



ISST 25  
*Reflections*

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL STUDIES TRUST



# ISST 25 Reflections



**INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL STUDIES TRUST**



## ISST BOARD MEMBERS

Names of Trustees/Chairperson	Period
Raj Krishna	1980 - 1981
Sita Ram Goel - Chairperson	1980 - 1986
Ram Swaroop	1980 - 1983
Gopi Krishnn	1980 - Till date
Som Benegal	1982 - 1983
Shanti Ghosh - Trustee	1982 - 1986
Shanti Ghosh - Chairperson	1986 - 1988
Radha Bhatt	1982 - Till date
Leela Chandrashekhar	1982 - 1996
Ranjit Gupta - Chairperson	1988 - 1997
Ranjit Gupta - Trustee	1997 - 2004
A. Vaidyanathan - Trustee	1989
A. Vaidyanathan - Chairperson	1997 - Till date
N. Krishnan	1989 - Till date
Devaki Jain	1994 - Till date
Jasjit Purewal	1997 - 2003
Padma Ramachandran	1997 - Till date
Gita Sen	1997 - Till date
Madhu Kishwar	1997 - Till date
Nirmala Banerjee	2005
Sharada Jain	2005

## ISST DIRECTORS

Devaki Jain	1980 - 1994
Swapna Mukhopadhyay	1994 - 2003
Ratna M Sudarshan	2003 - Till date



---

# Contents

---

Foreword .....	4
ISST: 1980-2005 Twenty-Five Years .....	6
Areas of Concern .....	9
ISST—Supporting Networks .....	26
<i>Ela Bhatt</i>	
ISST—A World of Meaningful Knowledge .....	29
<i>C.P. Sujaya</i>	
ISST in Bangalore .....	32
<i>K.S. Krishnaswamy</i>	
ISST : Some Recollections .....	33
<i>Malini Chand Sheth</i>	
Reminiscences of Early Years at ISST .....	36
<i>Rekha Bezboruah</i>	
My Experiences with ISST .....	38
<i>Tara Appachu Sharma</i>	
ISST—The Early Years .....	39
<i>Mukul Mukherjee</i>	
ISST—A Wholesome Beginning .....	42
<i>Vrinda Gupta</i>	
Innovative Courage: Remembering ISST .....	43
<i>Srilatha Batliwala</i>	
Women's Work, Natural Resources, and ISST .....	48
<i>Priya Shyamsundar</i>	
An Enabling Atmosphere .....	49
<i>Raj Viridi</i>	
What I Feel About ISST .....	51
<i>Nidhi Singh</i>	
Impacting Lives .....	52
<i>Saraswathy Ganapathy</i>	
'People Related Work': What ISST has Meant to Me .....	54
<i>Revathi Narayanan</i>	
ISST's Nurturing Environment .....	56
<i>Shobna Sonpar</i>	
Placing ICT in the Discourse of Gender: My Reflections .....	58
<i>Swasti Mitter</i>	
Reminiscences .....	60
<i>Ranjit Gupta</i>	
Building a Service Station Brick by Brick .....	67
<i>Devaki Iain</i>	



---

What – if anything – is unique about ISST? We thought the best way to find out might be to ask those who have been associated in different capacities with the institute since its inception, to reflect upon their experiences at – or with - ISST. This small souvenir, published to mark the institute's Silver Jubilee year, includes contributions from ex-staff, former trustees, and others associated in varying capacities and at different times with the institution. The context is set by a brief overview of the work done, individual reminiscences have been presented in a roughly chronological order of association with the institute, and we end with two analyses of the organisation, one by Prof. Ranjit Gupta and the other by Mrs Devaki Jain.

If ISST has survived so far, this is testimony to a framework and ideology that has allowed it to re-invent itself, re-define its structure and re-orient its work. Organisational crisis is usually triggered by lack of money, lack of relevance or lack of people with ideas – or all three. 'From shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations' can be as true of an NGO as of a business enterprise. The willingness to let new energies navigate the institution has not been painless, but it has been successful.

## Foreword

---

Those of us who are at ISST today feel strongly that it has been able to do somewhat more than just survive; and there is little doubt that the very lack of formal structure and form, its relative 'informality', has allowed and enabled renewal and vitality.

ISST has remained a relatively small institution, which has been a springboard for many people, as testified by some of the pieces contained here. The organisation has changed a great deal since its inception, and will, no doubt, continue to change and evolve as time goes on. Research undertaken for advocacy has a dynamics of its own and publication often falls by the wayside; rigorous research of high academic quality often fails in wide dissemination. At different times, with different projects, ISST has worked in different ways. The sum total of experience generated by ISST's work remains an inspiration.

So *ISST: Reflections* is dedicated to the 'ISST family', to the founders, the successors, all those who have supported and contributed to its work, with gratitude to the past and many hopes for the future. ■



# ISST: 1980-2005

## Twenty-Five Years<sup>1</sup>

ISST was set up as a Trust in 1980, and the initial years of its existence were part of the excitement of the first decade following the First World Conference on Women in 1975. Research in the area of women's studies, setting up programmes, practices and institutional machinery, and activism, were all closely intertwined in these early years. As one of the first organisations to undertake systematic research in women's studies, ISST was a leader in developing a research and planning agenda for women.

In mainstream research organisations, the natural cycle of research, publication and dissemination, does not always find itself accompanied by advocacy or even activism. As a corollary, theory plays a stronger role than in organisations like ISST which seek to 'bridge research and action'. Here, research leads easily and naturally into advocacy and activism, and publication becomes a secondary objective. The constant attempt to confront, understand, document and change the practice of things places a heavy burden on the researcher, and theoretical rigour often loses out to the need to show immediate impact. It is not surprising, therefore that many people have left ISST for more activist, grass-roots and field oriented organisations. It is not surprising also that a large part of ISST studies remain unpublished. And also to find that the organisation, time and again, has attempted (perhaps even unconsciously or half-consciously) to find ways of bringing activism within its ambit, in different ways. Similarly, advocacy with national governments at the state

and the centre was very much part of ISST's purpose of being. Internationally, too, it was able to carry the voices of Indian women to many forums, enabled by the Special Consultative Status granted by UN-ECOSOC in recognition of its contributions in placing women's concerns higher on the agenda of development initiatives. Another example of its international status is the role it played in the development of a forum such as DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women in a New Era).

A review of ISST studies over the last 25 years shows on the one hand that the issues or themes of the research itself have not changed very much; on the other hand there are equally notable changes reflecting only partly internal organisational factors, and to a greater extent changes in the external environment. ISST's focus has been on a range of issues relevant to concerns of gender, poverty and development, and most of the research undertaken has been in four broad areas, women and work, governance, health and economic reform.

Studies that can be grouped under the broad theme of 'health' were mainly concerned initially with service delivery aspects, gradually being replaced by more analytical studies and greater concern with the macro policy framework. This has included studies on population policy, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. The element of 'activism' in this area of work is seen both in the setting up of a Family Counselling Centre which functioned over a period of sixteen years, and where the concerns included mental health and well-being. It is also seen in the gender training undertaken and handbook prepared in relation to HIV/AIDS and gender concerns.

In the area of governance, defined broadly to include institutions of governance and development approaches, the initial work was almost entirely supportive of government efforts, consisting mainly of developing catalogues and directories of agencies working

<sup>1</sup> This section draws heavily on an earlier paper by Bhuvana Krishnan reviewing ISST research. Rina Bhattacharya and Bhuvana Krishnan have contributed the annotated review of projects.





with poor women, and also including working with the government to engender state planning in Karnataka. Some studies were undertaken critiquing development paradigms from a gender perspective. Studies of institutional machinery for women's advancement and policy tools such as gender budgeting can also be included here. More recently analytical studies have been undertaken to understand the meaning and implications of 'engendering governance'. In this area, activism took the form of a sustained and pioneering effort to train elected women representatives primarily in Karnataka and also in neighbouring states with the eight-year-long UMA project activity. The training manuals developed under this project continue to be widely used in the country.

In the area of women's work, early studies were descriptive and many were in the form of case studies and sectoral studies, seeking to document women workers in a range of little known activities and to highlight their role and contribution to both the household and the wider economy. Several project development activities were undertaken. A major and pioneering thrust was engendering statistics and the measurement of work. ISST's Time Allocation study was the first of its kind, and had a major influence on the accounting of women's work. At different times, studies on skill development/ vocational training have also been undertaken. Programme reviews, including a seminal analysis of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme, have also been undertaken. A number of studies have been done on the general theme of informal economy, poverty and women's work. In this area, activism took the form of setting up a Women's Resource Centre to document and disseminate information with special focus on women's work; and the Mahila Haat project (now an autonomous organisation).

Finally, an impressive and wide range of studies have been undertaken under the Gender Network, an umbrella project extending over eight years and including studies undertaken by partners across South and South East Asia. This wider network was enabled both by sustained

research funding support and new technologies of communication. This programme moved a step beyond the more descriptive and advocacy efforts to undertake theoretically rigorous and carefully designed studies in a number of related areas to map the impact of reforms on gender. As it comes to a close and moves into a dissemination phase, we expect this to yield valuable lessons for policy.

In the early years, the studies undertaken at ISST were largely funded by government directly or, in a few cases, by international organisations working closely with the government. Today, however, the bulk of ISST work is funded by bilateral or multilateral agencies, although work continues to be done for government agencies. However, the interaction with the government was undoubtedly much closer in the first half of the period being reviewed than in the second half. The change in funding sources is also associated with an expansion in the scale of work and size of the organisation. Today, there are a large number of organisations concerned with women's studies/gender studies. The link between activism, policy and planning, and research is today more tenuous in comparison to the late '70s. Over the years, there has been the growth of an autonomous civil society, of which ISST is a part, and which seeks a kind of independence which was perhaps not visualised twenty-five years ago.

Another element of continuity in ISST's work is found in the manner in which it has always chosen to work closely with local organisations to ensure the appropriateness and applicability of the work done. The communities and families involved have been kept aware of the purpose of the research and been able to input into its design so that the outputs have as much direct relevance to their lives as possible. This aspect of its research ethics and participatory methods is drawn from Gandhian methods, a strong influence on most development research in India upto the '70s. In this, too, ISST can be considered a pioneer, having internalised techniques and values long before they became an accepted part of social science



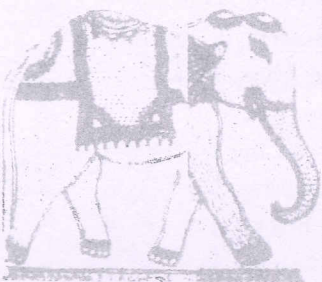


research *vide* PRA techniques, institutional ethics, etc. The fallout of this has been a wide network with field organisations and activists in many different parts of the country, not always 'activated', but present nonetheless as a part of its inheritance.

More recently, since the mid-90s, ISST has become active in regional/ South Asia studies, something that has been facilitated immensely by the Internet and computer technology, and which has allowed a new perspective on old problems. In fact, ICTs form an integral part of its latest effort at activism, the Community

Outreach Centre and the extension centre of the Habitat Learning Centre.

In summary then, ISST research has been influenced by the external environment in many ways, and the internal compulsions have likewise influenced its choices and directions. As a small organisation with insecure and fluctuating funding, it has not always been able to tie up loose ends or to enable continuity between projects and people. But that drawback has been amply compensated by new energies and new commitments that have ensured that it remained a healthy vibrant organisation. ■





## I. Women's Work

### **I**mpact on Women Workers, Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme – A Study (Sponsored by ILO, 1979)

This study was commissioned by ILO to look at the impact of the EGS on women workers, with a view to suggesting improvements in the scheme's design and implementation. The recommendations made included ensuring that differences between male and female workers be accommodated, changing the nature of the public works undertaken and the ratio of female/male labour, improvements in the payment system to ensure direct food needs of women and their families were met, as well as greater integration with other welfare schemes.

**The Status of Women's Employment: Revaluation of Employment Guarantee Scheme, Maharashtra and Its Impact on Women Workers** was sponsored by the Department of Women's Welfare, Ministry of Human Resource Development and USAID, 1987, to examine the changes if any, that had taken place in terms of availability of work, wage payment system, wage parity between men and women, gang formation, distance of the work site, amenities provided to the workers etc. This was a re-evaluation study hence the sample for study was drawn from the sample of the previous study conducted by ISST in 1978. The study found that income earned through EGS was crucial for household survival. The study recommended that any change in the policy must recognize the gender component.

### **Exercises in Project Development for Women** (Sponsored by Swedish International Development Authority, 1980)

To prepare project proposals for the selected organisations engaged in income generating activities to provide employment to women. For this ten voluntary agencies were selected from all over India. Of these seven organisations were working for poor women and three were engaged in conducting programmes for women but not conceived as purely women's organisation. The selected organisations were Self Employed

# Areas of Concern

Women's Association (Gujarat), Chikan Workers Co-operative (Uttar Pradesh), Princess Esin Educational Centre (Hyderabad), Kasturba Vanvasi Kanya Ashram (Madhya Pradesh), Assam Pradeshic Mahila Samity (Assam), Kasturba Mahila Uthan Mandal (Uttar Pradesh), Mizo Women's Federation (Mizoram), Dashauli Gram SwarajSangh, (Uttar Pradesh), Sulabh Sauchalaya (Bihar) and Kailash Trust (Maharashtra).

### **Technical Seminar on Women's Work and Employment** (Sponsored by ICSSR, 1982)

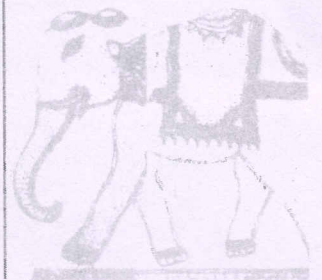
The focus of the discussion was around measurement of work and its implications. The Time Allocation study conducted by ISST was discussed, and its argument that there is a close connection between valuation of all the work that women do, and an accurate measurement of labour force. The time allocation study, by using a time use schedule for different household activities of women was one way of measuring the time spent on non-market work. Other papers addressed the nature of household work and its measurement, the displacement of female workers by male and the slow rate of growth of the economy between 1961-1981.

### **An Assessment of Women's Roles – The Karnataka Sericulture Development Project** (Sponsored by Ford Foundation, 1982)

Examined the Sericulture Development Project of the State Government with a view to understanding the benefits accruing to poor households, and women in particular.

### **Inter State Tasar Project: Field Survey** (Sponsored by Swiss Development Corporation, 1982)

The purpose was to look at how the tasar development project run by the Development Corporation of Vidarbha could improve the lives of tribal families. The findings suggested various





improvements including a better understanding with the forest authorities, granting of leases to producers directly, greater protection of their legal rights, more linkages with other development programmes, provision of adequate credit and improved technical support.

**Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas, DWCRA – Preparation of a Plan with Focus on Women** (Sponsored by Ministry of Rural Development, 1984)

This study involved preparing a block plan as a model for demonstrating the methodology of working from below while also ensuring the workability of the plan through actual implementation on the ground. Four hundred households were covered in 20 villages in Chikmagalur Taluk in Karnataka. The study findings indicated that many of the activities under the DWCRA scheme tended to be stereotyped and it would be better to take up more locally viable options such as poultry farming and rabbit meat export.

**India's Female-Headed Households** (Sponsored by ILO, 1984)

To assess socio-economic characteristics of female-headed household and to evolve a definition of female headedness. The findings of the study presented a socio-economic characteristic of female-headed households based on a survey carried out in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Karnataka using interviews, case studies and focus group discussions.

**Impact of Sericulture Pilot Project in Kanakapura** (Sponsored by Department of Sericulture, Government of Karnataka, 1989)

It was found that the introduction of female extension workers to provide training and support services to women engaged in sericulture had improved rearing practices, but by and large their services had not been found to be as helpful as expected, by the beneficiaries themselves. This had possibly to do with the fact that decision-makers were primarily males in the households and that the assimilation of technical knowledge was a slow process.

**Identification of Employment Opportunities for Women in Village Industries in UP and Rajasthan** (Sponsored by Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resources Development, 1991)

To understand the structure and functioning of village industries, the problems these industries face in terms of raw material, marketing etc., whether any government employment programmes exist in these villages, and if the existing organisations have the potential to create more employment. The study concluded that in view of the nature of the unemployment and under-employment in rural areas, non-agricultural activities need to be encouraged and supported on a long-term basis, especially in more remote areas, the hills and the desert. Public policy needed to promote as well as support traditional industries employing rural women, and develop viable and permanent institutional support for raw material, credit, marketing etc. Area planning and strengthening of local institutions such as Panchayats, with representation of women in decision-making, planning and implementation, was recommended.

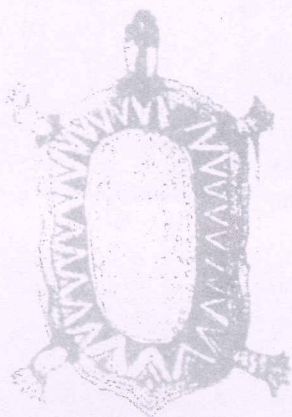
**Informal Economy & Women's Work**

**Women's Quest for Power: Five Case Studies.** (Sponsored by ICSSR, 1980)

The study was to look at Indian organisations where women in fairly large numbers have become active participants. The study attempted to identify the crucial levers through which women can participate more fully in national development. The five case studies include the experiences of Street Vendors of Ahmedabad, Milk Producers of Kaira, Pappad Rollers of Lijjat, Painters of Madhuban and Night Patrollers of Manipur.

**Statistics on Women, Children and Aged in Agriculture in India** (Sponsored by the Statistics Division, FAO, 1983)

Was conducted to do systematic scanning of data sources of agricultural workers in India to identify the data gaps and to suggest





procedures for improving the statistical picture by suggesting new tabulations from existing data and indicating the types of new data that were to be collected and the possible new methodologies. The report related mainly to the three major official sources on statistics relating to agriculture: Census, NSS and Agriculture/ Rural Labour Enquiries. For strengthening the database it was suggested that the immediate task was to re-tabulate and disaggregate the available relevant information by occupation, sex and age to bring women, children and aged into sharper focus.

**Employment of Women from Kerala in the Fish Processing Units of Gujarat** (Sponsored by Ministry of Labour, Government of India, 1984)

To look at the conditions of women migrant workers from Kerala with a view to promote the scope of employment as well as to improve the working conditions of female labours. Women workers from Kerala migrate seasonally to coastal areas in the North to work in the seafood processing industries. The study was conducted in ten processing plants in Veraval (Gujarat). The study examined their comparative wages, supply and demand position of skilled and semi-skilled women workers, working and living conditions, and the rate of growth of average real earnings of the industry to see if there could be an increase in wage with growth of skill. Also assessed the socio-economic conditions of households in Kerala from where labour was drawn.

**Fisherwomen of Tadri: A Socio-Economic Survey** (Sponsored by Government of India and Danish International Development Agency, 1985)

This survey was undertaken for the Indo-Danish Fisheries Project to assess the impact of modernising the fishing industry in the Tadri area of Uttara Kanada in coastal Karnataka, especially in terms of the effect on poorest households, and women in particular. The survey showed that mechanised fishing had raised fish outputs but a good part of the benefits had accrued to middlemen and agents. Despite this, incomes of boat owners and labourers had increased, but this had not necessarily resulted in improving

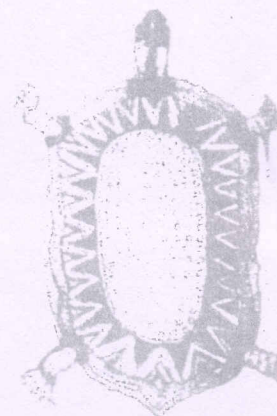
the quality of life of the households due to problems such as alcoholism. The introduction of cooperative societies had also not been enough to displace the middlemen. Women in particular had not benefited and it was vital to promote additional work opportunities and improve their work environment.

**Perspective Based on Women Workers in the Urban Informal Sector** (Sponsored by ILO, 1986)

To review the role of NGOs in supporting women workers. The issues of welfare of women workers in urban informal sector and improving their employment and working conditions were studied in three non-governmental organisations - Belgaum Beedi Workers' union, Chikodi Taluka Kamgar Mahasangh, Nipani; Annapurna Mahila Mandal, Bombay; and Mobile Crèches in Bombay and Delhi.

**Small Scale Forest Based Enterprises with Special Reference to the Roles of Women** (Sponsored by Department of Planning, Government of Karnataka and FAO, 1987)

The study sought to analyse the nature of the roles of women in small scale forest based enterprises in Karnataka and to present a tangible set of policy recommendations to strengthen these roles. The study was done at three levels: national, Karnataka state and micro level case studies. At the national level, the study found that participation of women was higher where local level technologies and skills were used and limited access to markets was a major reason for exploitation of women. Erosion of traditional rights over forest based produce had affected women adversely and very few attempts had been made to provide training or some sort of security to women workers. At the state level, the study recommended that there be a shift from major to minor forest produce, a greater emphasis on small rural based units and greater incentives from government to cooperative and self employment based activities as well as family labour. The case studies looked at the lacquerware artisans of Channapatna and *uppage* collection in the forests of North Kanara.





**The Role of Informal Sector in Poverty Alleviation in India** (Sponsored by UN-ESCAP, 1995)

Examined the significance of informal service sector in poverty alleviation in India. This is a sector where growth is occurring at two ends of the spectrum—in profitable, high profile activities on the one hand and low-paying, subsistence-type jobs on the other hand. This sometimes happens within the same type of jobs within narrowly defined industrial categories, concluded a survey in Delhi of 121 cases, of which 106 are male and 15 are females, belonging to different sub-sector categories such as petty trade, transport, domestic service, repair and maintenance and other personal services. The problems faced by informal service sectors include credit, training, and good public infrastructure. The competition is intense, especially at the lower ends, where the scope for product differentiation is limited, as is access to resources and market information. Petty traders, repair and maintenance workers and some personal service workers reported harassment by police and local government officials. The number of such complaints was relatively lower for transport workers and none for the domestic workers who on the other hand are accorded the lowest status. The study brought out the substantial gaps between availability and perceived requirements for a range of resources and services.

**Women in Extreme Poverty** (Sponsored by UN-ESCAP, 1996)

This was a part of a multi-country study on Women in Extreme Poverty sponsored by the Women in Development section of UN-ESCAP. The study outlined the differential characteristics of households with perceived headship, and the contribution of the heads to economic sustenance of the households. It substantiated that the incidence of poverty was much higher among female-headed households as compared to male-headed ones, independent of the maintenance criterion. The finding was based on household surveys conducted in some villages of Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh and selected slums of New Delhi. A two-stage sampling procedure was

adopted. More than 300 households were listed in both the locations with the information on male and female heads. In each location the exact number of female-headed households was identified and then from the list an equivalent number of male-headed households were selected for the study.

**Women's Work in South Asia: A Situational Analysis and Policy Concerns** (Sponsored by ILO, 1997-98)

The study reviewed the range of existing countervailing policies and programmes including statutory legal and constitutional provisions as well as the national support structure for equitable access to employment opportunities for women in South Asia. The study provided the elements of a new agenda for action.

**Herbal Medicinal Plants: An Analysis** (Sponsored by NCAER/Ford Foundation, 1997-99)

The study explored the market linkages in the trade of herbal medicinal products as well as estimated the contribution of these products both to the livelihood of the collectors' household as well as to the macro-economy. The fieldwork for this project was done in Himachal Pradesh in collaboration with two local level NGOs, Navrachna and Society for Rural Development and Action. The study was a part of a programme of research co-ordinated by NCAER, supported by the Ford Foundation, on the 'Contribution of the Informal Sector to the Economy'; SEWA and GIDR conducted other studies.

**Chronic Poverty and Intra-Household Resource Allocation: A Preliminary Enquiry** (Sponsored by IIPA, 2003)

The study based on a household survey in the slum clusters in Delhi concluded that even within chronically poor households, the same patterns of discrimination seem to exist as have been noted elsewhere and a rather stereotypical picture of the Indian household emerges from it. For this 160 households were studied of which sixty per cent lie below the poverty line based on the criteria given in the *Economic Survey of Delhi*





(2001-2002). The various methods used to collect information were questionnaires, case studies and interviews on different issues such as education and health, household income and expenditure, gender differences in access and control over resources, household food consumption, nutritional outcomes in the form of height and weight measurement, food related practices and nutritional knowledge, household coping strategies at times of financial stress.

### **Adult Education/Vocational Training**

**Adult Education for Women: 8 Case Studies** (Sponsored by Directorate of Education, Ministry of Education and Culture, Government of India, 1984)

The study reviewed the efforts of a selected group of organisations both government and non-government, which were successful in reaching women with various forms of adult education. Of the eight organisations reviewed, three were formally conducting National Adult Education Programme, and the remaining five were NGOs, labour union, and developmental organisation and organisations motivated with Sarvodaya ideology. The reviewed organisations were Delhi administration's Department of Adult Education in the Muslim area of old Delhi, Rajasthan University's Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Young Women's Christian Association, Janashiksha Prachar Kendra (JPK), Chattisgarh Miners Shramik Sangh (CMSS), Action for Welfare and Awakening in Rural Environment, Sarvangeen Gram Vikas Mandal and Dashauli Gram Swaraj Sangh.

**A Study of Utilisation & Wastage of Training Programme of NVTI & RVTI for Women** (Sponsored by Directorate General of Employment & Training, Ministry of Labour & Rehabilitation, Government of India, 1986)

To evaluate the working experience of the Vocational Training Institute and to assess the extent of utilisation and wastage of training in respect of National and Regional Vocational Training Institutes for Women. The findings of the study based on interviews with 466 ex-

trainees from three centres located in Delhi, Bangalore and Bombay indicated that the ex-trainees who got employed were absorbed in the skill they were trained for and a little less than fifty per cent of the trainees were absorbed in employment. Among the vocations electronics, secretarial practice, and dressmaking accounted for maximum employment. The reasons for unemployment were lack of demand of the skill/vocation learnt, lack of support institutional services for self-employment. Suggestions included improvement in the training curricula, selection of employment oriented skills for training, provision for knowledge of self-employment.

**Promotion of Legal Awareness among Women** (Sponsored by UN-ESCAP, 1994)

To conduct legal awareness camps and to hold a national level seminar on women and law. Three camps were organized in three colleges of Delhi University on legal literacy for women with a view to provide basic knowledge of law and to hold discussions on the process of accessing the existing structures of law and law implementing agencies when needed. Legal experts from the Multiple Action Research Group (MARG) were the principal resource persons for the question-answer sessions and lawyers, legal experts and police personnel served as panelists in the discussion. Habib Tanvir's theatre group enacted a short play depicting various problems and harassment faced by women due to lack of awareness. The seminar on women and law concluded that a feminist jurisprudence needs to be evolved through a reinterpretation of the concepts of equality, protection and status.

**Evaluation of the NORAD-assisted Programme for Training and Income Generating Activities for Women in Madhya Pradesh** (Sponsored by Department of Women & Child Development, Ministry of Human Resources Development, 1994-95)

To evaluate various income generating programmes under NORAD scheme implemented in Madhya Pradesh against the set of objectives given in the guidelines and to suggest





changes for better designing and implementation of the programmes. In all, 17 projects were in operation of which ISST evaluated 9 projects. The information on economic and demographic characteristics of beneficiaries, type and quality of training imparted, stipend related issues, community awareness of the trainees, their perception of the programme were collected using questionnaire and focus group discussion methods.

**Decent Employment for Women Learning and Recommendations from the pilot project**  
(Sponsored by ILO, 2004)

The study documented the interventions undertaken under the ILO pilot project, which was started in 2001 to help poor women living in selected slum clusters in the cities of Bangalore and Delhi attain decent employment. The project provided skills and capacity training to women for the purpose. In both places, the trainees trained by the NGOs were interviewed. The details on the remuneration, work hours, type of work undertaken by the trained workers were analysed to understand whether the skill learned had been utilised fully or not. The trainers and other associated staff were interviewed regarding training input, problems and constraints. The report concludes with some learning and recommendations based on the project experience in the area of skill selection and availability of employment, market linkages, and placement/handholding, upscaling and sustainability.

**Evaluation of STEP projects (Dairy): Karnataka Co-operative Milk Federation & Nittur Education Society** (Sponsored by Department of Women and Child Development Government of India, 2005)

The objective of evaluation was to see how far the objectives of the STEP (Support for Training and Employment of Women) programme are being met. The information relating to women's time and earnings, outreach of the programme to the poorest, environmental aspects of dairying and impact on household consumption of milk were collected using

questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions.

### Women's Resource Centre

In 1981, the ISST opened 'Jigyasa' a reading room-cum-documentation centre. This was set-up as a first step towards providing information, network service on women's studies/women's development. It housed a unique and informal collection of unpublished and original documents collected from conferences, research groups, and government agencies focussing on poor women. In 1984, the Ministry of Labour, Government of India provided financial support to ISST to bring out a bibliography on *Women at Work in India*. The bibliography was well-received by researchers, policy-makers and those interested in women's studies. In 1987, ISST received a grant from IDRC for a period of three years with an objective of enhancing the capability of ISST to provide information on women's studies with special reference to 'Women at Work'. Subsequently ISST received a financial grant for four years (1991-1994) from the Royal Netherlands Embassy to develop its documentation centre as a fully computerized women's resource centre.

**Women At Work: A Bibliography (Vol:I & Vol:II)**. (Sponsored by IDRC, 1987- 1990)

Compiled a review of studies on women at work based on published and unpublished material collected by ISST over the years. Drawing upon the material available with the institute as well as with several other institutions in the country, ISST put together a bibliography entitled, *Women at Work in India: A Bibliography*. This was published in 1986 by Sage Publications covering literature from the year 1947-1985. The second volume updated the earlier work to include books, papers, and articles from published and unpublished sources and presented an annotated bibliography of the work done till 1978. The volume also included the annotated bibliography of research in 1985, which was included in the earlier volume, but was not annotated.





**Women Studies Resource Centre** (Sponsored by Royal Netherlands Embassy, 1991-94)

ISST's documentation unit established itself as a platform for dissemination of information on gender and development issues, including ISST research findings and others including journal articles, seminar and conference papers, etc. Active networking and maintaining contact with policy-making bodies and research units was part of its role. The unit offered bibliographical and referral services to readers including scholars, policy-makers, and researchers.

### **Mahila Haat**

ISST designed a project to link women producers groups from all over India to a common facilitation centre, the nucleus of which was to be provided by ISST. The idea originated in 1985 when 53 women producers groups from different parts of India were identified and a workshop was held. The various problems faced by the group were raw materials, credit and technical assistance in design and feedback. In 1986 a stall was opened in Dastkar Bazaar to facilitate marketing of the women producers groups' produce. The facilitation centre at ISST was called Mahila Haat, which was registered as a society in 1987 under the Society's Registration Act of 1860. In May 1994, Mahila Haat became a separate institution for technical reasons as per the advice of the then auditors.

**Women Producers of Kumaon** (Sponsored by Royal Netherlands Embassy, 1988)

Conducted a survey of women producers' groups from low-income communities in Kumaon with a view to understand the problems and constraints faced by the women producers and to help them become strong and self-reliant by providing them with necessary assistance. The survey included women involved in different activities such as wool, cultivation and marketing of chillis, milk and *khoya*, and collection of medicinal herbs.

**Study on Shandy Women Vendors in Thally Block.** (Sponsored by Tamil Nadu Education Foundation, 1989)

The study looked at the economic situation of shandy women, their problems and needs, in Dharmapuri district in Tamil Nadu as part of the Mahila Haat initiative of ISST that sought to provide training and support to self-employed women producers. The study found that, although vending provided very low income in relation to the long hours and physical effort required, it was still a chosen option because of the lack of alternative livelihood opportunities and general backwardness. The gradual disintegration of the shandies as bigger markets displaced them was a major problem. The study suggested the situation of the shandy women could be improved through providing information of how to get credit support at reasonable rates and training in more viable livelihood opportunities.

**Mahila Haat Progress Report** (Sponsored by UNDP and UNIFEM, 1989 and 1990)

These two reports looked at the progress in the activities of the Mahila Haat project focusing on rural women producers in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Tamil Nadu. The main purpose of the project was to give support and training to women producers, including encouraging them to form groups and the setting up of a sample room-cum-facilitation centre to display their products. Apart from this, surveys were conducted of the rural haats in different locations in the above mentioned states. The support provided to women producers groups included assisting them in formulating project proposals, accessing credit and helping them build local markets.

## **II. Governance/ Development Approaches**

**Khet Majoor Mahajan Gujarat** (Sponsored by ILO, 1980)

Reviewed a trade union of agricultural labourers in Gujarat in order to understand problems of agricultural labourers in the area, perceived benefit of the labourers to join the union and appropriateness of the formal trade union relevant organisational structure for the





rural poor. Three organisations located in two districts of Ahmedabad were reviewed for the purpose. The organisations were Gandhi Majoor Mahajan (GMM) or Textile Labour Association (TLA), the Khet Majoor Mahajan (KMM)/ Agricultural Labour Association (ALA) and the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA). Textile Labour Association being the mother union had encouraged the sprouting of KMM and SEWA.

**Catalogue of Agencies Reaching Poorest Women in India** (Sponsored by Swedish International Development Authority, 1981)

This study was done to identify organisations, preferably women's organisations who were working effectively with under-privileged women, and capable of taking on an additional programme of work supported by SIDA. Around 100 organisations were identified across the country which were working for women's development, reaching the poorest, with fairly widespread coverage and sustainable projects.

**Integrating Women's Interests into a State Five Year Plan.** (Sponsored by Ministry of Social Welfare, 1983)

The purpose of this study was to assess the implications for women of the implementation of the State Plan in Karnataka as it existed, and secondly, to generate for the consideration of the state government concrete suggestions for better integration of women's interests in both plan formulation and implementation. Recommendations included building a more comprehensive and gender disaggregated data base with a redefinition of categories itself so that terms such as "occupation" for instance would be differentiated for men and women separately, accounting properly for the household work of women, making of area-wise plans and decentralization of decision-making.

**Indian Women's Experience of Development: An Analysis** (Sponsored by ICSSR, 1985)

This study attempted to study the impact of development in empowering women. In 1985, a decade after the first world conference on women, how far had Indian women been

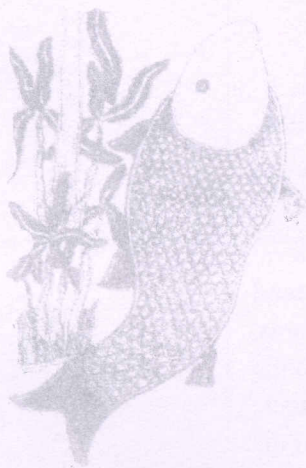
'empowered'? To understand this, the status of women in terms of demographic variables such as the sex ratio, mortality rate, life expectancy and economic variables like workforce participation rate were analysed. It was argued that unequal division of labour in the household, and job discrimination at work place, are some of the factors that acted against improvement in status. Practices such as dowry and infanticide reinforce discrimination. Active effort was needed not only to create jobs, but also to remove barriers that obstruct women's full and equal participation in the economy. The study recommended a continuous and powerful propaganda to build awareness about the fact that social customs and traditions are not invariant or sacrosanct.

**Directory of Welfare Agencies in Karnataka State** (Sponsored by Ministry of Welfare, Government of India, 1987)

ISST was invited to compile a directory of agencies working in the field of welfare of children, women, the aged and the disabled. The aim was to include both institutional and non-institutional services provided by both government and non-government agencies. The compilation was based on the premise that the greater emphasis in the fifth and sixth plans, as also in the seventh, on involving non-governmental agencies in implementing government welfare programmes, required identification and listing of welfare agencies nationally. Only registered welfare agencies were taken cognizance of, in keeping with the government's directives.

**Discussion Paper on Institutional Mechanisms for Women's Advancement** (Sponsored by the Royal Netherlands Embassy, 1991)

This study, prepared as part of the Women's Information Services Project, looked at the Indian experience in the area of promotion of women's advancement, by recording the milestones, describing the structures, processes and circumstances under which they operated to provide insights for future strategies. In





particular it examined the Indian landscape in terms of pre-and post-decade efforts for structuring women's advancement, as well as the autonomous women's movement, and the contribution of women's studies. It discussed change – or absence of it – in Indian women's lives and the reasons for this, and, based on a review of the subject as a whole, proposed an appropriate mechanism for the South countries.

**Mining in the Himalayas: A field study in Almora and Pithoragarh** (Sponsored by IDRC, 1991)

The study documented the environmental impact of open cast mining including land degradation, water pollution and health hazards, as well as the economic and social impact. The study included a geological study, legal assessment, and socio-economic survey. It concluded that the few positive impacts were overshadowed by the adverse ecological impacts, and highlighted women's role in making the adverse impacts visible. Specific suggestions included better monitoring of mining processes, proper dumping of the waste generated during processing, afforestation to prevent landslide, retaining walls on slopes and check dams in valleys to prevent water pollution and ensure soil conservation.

**The role of Mahila Mandals in Locally Managed Rural Development Programmes with Special Reference to Panchayati Raj System.** (Sponsored by Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, 1991-92)

The aim of the study was to identify the factors external and internal to Mahila Mandals which contribute to their success or stagnation and the emerging policy and related measures necessary to enable women to be visible in social and economic development and in the decision-making process. The fieldwork included interviews with women members of Mahila Mandals and panchayats in the selected districts of Uttaranchal and Karnataka. In Uttaranchal, women members of Mahila Mandals/ Panchayats were found to be handicapped by lack of information about formal structures, their scope and functions. In case of Karnataka

wherever women in Mahila Mandals had access to panchayats, they demonstrated leadership qualities, were able to articulate and press for development needs of their constituency and to organise protests against anti-social practices.

**Sustainable Development through Natural Resource Utilisation** (Sponsored by the Norwegian Agency for Development Corporation, 1994)

This case study done in Karnataka looked at the availability and rational utilisation of natural resources in two villages in Kanakapura with a view to drawing up and actioning a plan for their optimum use, with the involvement and participation of villagers. This included various measures such as improved agricultural practices, introduction of additional livelihood options and local self-management of common property resources.

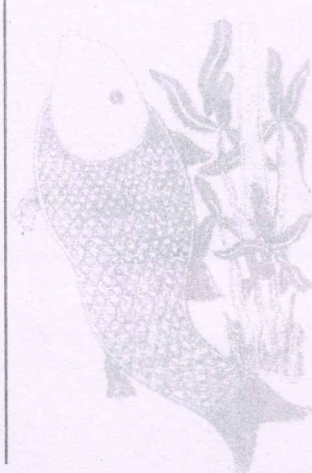
**Evaluation of the Scheme for setting up of Women's Development Corporations** (Sponsored by Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resources Development 1994-95)

The aim of the project was to evaluate the extent of success in setting up Women's Development Corporations with a view to suggest strategies at administrative as well as implementation level to strengthen its functioning. The study recommended improvements in the administrative structure and related aspects, resource generation, and programme designing and implementation mechanism.

**Utsahi Mahila Abhudyaya (UMA) Project** (Sponsored by Ford Foundation 1994-99; Sponsored by Action Aid India, 1999-2002)

- **Mela for Women in Panchayat Raj (1994)**

The report describes one of the highlights of the UMA projects activities – the Mela organized by ISST for 250 elected women representatives of the Karnataka Gram Panchayats. The events leading up to the Mela, what was hoped to be achieved and, the planning involved in organising it are





described. The proceedings of the Mela have been captured in an innovative manner designed to bring out the spirit of the Mela itself.

- **Workshop on Alternative Methodologies and Curricula for Women in Panchayat Raj (1994)**

The report describes the proceedings of the workshop and articulates some of the ideas brought out during the discussions, which were focused on building a relevant and appropriate curriculum for women in Panchayat Raj. A framework and guidelines were developed, various methodologies and materials discussed and the experiences of women representatives shared. A core group was formed to carry the work forward in building the curriculum step-by-step.

- **Strengthening the Participation of Women in Local Governance (Project UMA) (1995)**

The report covers the rationale and strategies adopted in the project and the work carried out by the Resource Centre for Women in Panchayat Raj which was set up under the project, sponsored by Ford Foundation. The report also includes studies on women in Panchayat Raj carried out in eight states, as well as suggested areas for future action. Apart from this, there is coverage on the proceedings of the UMA Mela, a workshop for women Gram Panchayat representatives, and a compilation of research papers from eight different states prepared for the resource centre. The second volume of this report presents a detailed documentation of the facilitation and training camps carried out by the training wing of the project.

- **Report of the UMA Facilitation Camps for Women Representatives (1995)**

Under the UMA project, ISST undertook the task of conducting training and facilitation camps for women Gram Panchayat representatives in eight areas of the state. The report covers the methodology and process used, the contents of the training, as well as

its impact on the participants in their own words. In general the participants found the training very useful in helping them articulate their needs, build confidence and take positive action in their own lives.

- **National Seminar on Women in Panchayat Raj – Women in Panchayat Raj: Perspectives from Different States (1995)**

The report presents research studies on the situation of women Panchayat members, carried out in eight states under the UMA project. While ISST covered Karnataka, groups in seven other states—Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu—were approached to undertake the studies there. Different approaches were followed, highlighting a gamut of experiences. The issues debated included how women's participation is perceived, how to enable more effective participation, the need for better documentation and dissemination of information, the role of political parties in Panchayat Raj and the caste factor in politics.

- **A Report of the Workshop on Training Methodology and Materials (1998)**

This workshop, funded by Ford Foundation, brought together women representatives and NGO workers to look at the most effective methods and materials that could be used for training of Panchayat Raj elected members, especially women, at the grass-root level. The purpose was to get feedback on past experiences, discuss better methods and improvements in quality as well as build a network amongst all the stakeholders.

- **National Seminar on Women in Local Governance: Exploring New Frontiers (1999)**

The report summarises the proceedings of UMA's second national conference to assess the participation of women in Panchayat Raj. It brought together participants from diverse fields to exchange ideas, explore new linkages and discuss how to strengthen women's





participation in local governance. Papers were presented from seven states identifying region-specific issues, assessing government and NGO initiatives, looking at the effect of intervention programmes, and the impact on women members and their families. In addition to this, participants looked at issues relating to research, training and advocacy. The purpose of the conference was essentially to look ahead, keeping in mind what had happened before.

- **UMA UTSAV: for Women in Panchayat Raj (1999)**

The report is a compilation of the activities undertaken at the UMA UTSAV organised by ISST to facilitate the Elected Women Representatives who had made a remarkable contribution as Panchayat members and to encapsulate their experiences in the previous five years. An additional objective of the workshop was to know whether they were interested in recontesting the next Gram Panchayat elections.

- **Workshop on Prevention of Child Trafficking in Belgaum District** (Sponsored by Action Aid India, 1999)

The report examines the prevalent system of devadasis and the more modern problem of child prostitution, and presents the proceedings of a workshop on this issue. Having discussed the reasons for child prostitution and previous efforts geared towards its prevention, participants drew up action plans for tackling the problem. Measures suggested included awareness generation, education, health inputs, providing alternative economic opportunities, better policing and legal amendments.

- **Report of the Project—Women in Local Governance: Networking and Dissemination at UMA Resource Centre.** (Sponsored by Action Aid India, 2000)

The report details the aims and objectives and proposed activities of the UMA resources centre, set up with a view to promote greater awareness among elected women represen-

tatives (EWR) and build their capacities. It proposes, a study of woman's participation in the Gram Panchayat, information dissemination to the women and men representatives, as well as community leaders, and greater awareness generation and networking in the larger community, including research organisations, NGOs and government.

- **Redesigning from the Roots—Critical View of Training Initiatives: Towards Empowerment of Women and Redesigning Policy** (Sponsored by Department of Women and Child Development, 2000).

The purpose of the study was to evaluate training experiences undertaken towards empowering women, as part of a larger study sponsored by the Department of Women and Child Development for the preparation of a Policy Document for Women's Empowerment. Recommendations included the suggestion that training be seen as an ongoing exercise rather than as a one-off event, given priority and resourced properly by the State. It was also suggested that there be a larger information base available and greater collaboration between organisations working towards women's empowerment.

- **Seminar on Women in Local Governance: Experiences and Effective Interventions in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu** (Sponsored by Action Aid India, 2000)

The purpose of the seminar was to bring together organisations involved in working with women in local governance, with a view to sharing their experiences over the past five years, in order to distil the combined wisdom of these experiences to build a strategic thrust for future initiatives.

- **Gender, Governance and Gram Sabha Presentations from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh** (Sponsored by Action Aid India, 2001)

The report documents the proceedings of a regional seminar organised by ISST, aimed





at creating a space to deliberate about women in the context of governance and Gram Sabhas. The purpose was to share ideas and experiences with a view to developing future strategies to strengthen the Gram Sabha and engender governance.

- **Winds of Change: Report of the Study on All Women Gram Panchayats (AWGPs) at Athnur and Wanjarkheda of Karnataka.** (Sponsored by Action Aid India, 2002)

This study was undertaken as part of the UMA projects concern to document facts from the field, stories that made a difference and grass-root realities. The study looked at the factors leading to the genesis of the AWGPs, their functioning and plans, as well as how villagers, community leaders, officials and others had responded to their formation. The report told the story of these AGWPs in the words of the women themselves as well as those of other villagers and outsiders.

- **Completion Report of the Project – Women in Local Governance: Networking and Dissemination at UMA Resource Centre.** (Sponsored by Action Aid India, 2002)

The report describes the various activities carried out under the project sponsored by Action Aid. These included field trainings and capacity building of women representatives in five zones of Karnataka; publication and dissemination of *UMA Prachar* designed to raise awareness and public debate among the women representatives themselves and others; other documentation and field studies relating to the working of the local governance structures.

- **Gender Budget analysis in the state of Delhi and Himachal Pradesh with special reference to Food Policy and Health Policy.** (Sponsored by UNIFEM, 2001-2003)

The state budgets of Himachal Pradesh and Delhi were analysed from a gender perspective. An analysis of the gender differentiated food security situation in Delhi arising out of changes

in the Public Distribution System was done using household survey. This was conducted in four slum clusters in Trans-Jamuna region of Delhi. Also an analysis of the health status of population of Himachal Pradesh from a gender perspective gave an insight to the quality of the health delivery system prevailing in the state.

- **Beyond Practical Gender Needs–Women in North-Eastern and Hill States** (Sponsored by UNDP, September 2004-June 2005).

The study was commissioned under the UNDP-Planning Commission National Research Programme on Growth and Human Development with a view to understand the best ways in which women's strategic needs can be advanced in selected hill states, where the achievements in standard indicators is often better than in the rest of the country. The study found that a gap still remains in the provision of basic needs and that filling this gap would help advance the strategic needs of women. The study recommended strategies for engendering development policies in specific areas of concern such as health, education, violence, political participation and access to and ownership of property for the states of Meghalaya, Manipur, Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh. Partners included North East Network, SUTRA, Rural Women's Upliftment Centre and Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi Pariavaran Shiksha Sansthan.

- **Women in Leadership Positions** (Sponsored by UNDP, December 2004-May 2005)

A concept paper on Women in Leadership Positions was sponsored as part of a UNDP – DWCD Gender Research Programme. The paper was based on interviews, case studies and focus group discussions with women in leadership positions from selected areas in Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Manipur and Meghalaya and supplemented by a review of relevant literature. The interviews included not just the pradhan/heads of PRIs/ formal structures but also the presidents/heads of the informal groups like Mahila Mangal Dals.





### III. Health

#### **Rural Sanitation Technology Options.**

(Sponsored by Consortium on Rural Technology, 1981)

This report was based on a workshop to identify and appraise technology for sanitary latrines, bio-gas plants and smokeless *chulahs*. The purpose was to make a positive and practical contribution in identifying the available technological options in this field, and discuss their pros and cons. The main factors identified as vital in any rural sanitation programmes were to diminish health risks, liberate the scavengers from a demeaning job and cut costs in terms of better energy use. Various existing models of latrines, bio-gas plants and *chulahs* were analysed and suggestions made on how to improve them. It was also stressed that the participation of rural people needed to be enhanced in order to achieve greater uptake.

**Rural Sanitation** (Sponsored by Ministry of HRD, 1981)

This survey looked at the status of rural sanitation in three very different states: Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Various recommendations emerged from this exercise including the suggestion that traditional practices should be examined before devising or applying new schemes and local people, especially women, should be consulted regarding costs and materials to be used. It was found that low cost and locally relevant designs and schemes were likely to be more successful than more expensive and higher cost ones. It was also stressed that construction of toilets alone could not guarantee village sanitation without taking into account the specific character of the village and needs of women.

**Providing Comprehensive Child and Family Welfare Services** (Sponsored by UN Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, 1981)

This study is part of an exercise undertaken by the UN Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs with a view to developing

a model programme. In this context the ICDS project has been examined primarily from the perspective of households and families accessing it through a field study in Coorg. The study found that the ICDS had strengthened the staff of the health delivery system and also improved its utilization. In this respect it had done better than other government projects. However, its targeting and access needed to be improved to ensure the poorest greater benefits.

**Utilisation of Child Development Services: A Field Study** (Sponsored by Socio-Economic Research Unit, Planning Commission, 1981)

The study was to review various schemes directed towards children nation-wide with a view to understand the actual impact and the degree of utilisation of these services by poor households to improve delivery mechanism. The field survey was carried out in two states—Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. Information was collected at the household level using questionnaires focussing on health, education, employment and status of women and time utilisation and consumption patterns within the households. Besides data was also collected at the village level and functionaries level using interview and survey methods. Recommendations included the mechanism to strengthen the operational and administrative structure for implementation, community participation, and linkages with other programmes.

**Linking Fertility and the Socio-Economic Activity of Rural Women** (Sponsored by ILO, 1987)

In this case study of the Malur Rural Project of the Family Planning Association of India, the methodology adopted by FPAI in accomplishing social and economic transformation in the villages of rural Karnataka was analysed and the lessons drawn out. The study was sponsored by the Population and Labour Policies Research Programme of the ILO. It was found that there had been a decline in fertility, which, to a large extent was attributable to increased adoption of family planning methods. This, in turn, had been





brought about through health and educational programme efforts to promote the Small Family Norm, greater demand and delivery of family planning and maternal health services, a high degree of local activism and community participation in local voluntary groups and socio-economic development schemes and most importantly, the provision of education and employment options for girls and women.

**Identification of Factors Influencing Health and Nutrition of Rural Women and Children in Karnataka** (Sponsored by Planning Commission, GOI, 1992)

To document the various factors which influence health and nutrition of women and children, such as dietary and health beliefs, health care seeking behaviour, and perceptions regarding desirable family size. The study covered over 300 households in eight villages of Kanakapura taluk. Recommendations included providing education and incentives for delaying the age of first child birth, encouraging beneficial traditions regarding dietary and other practices, education on safe management of deliveries, promoting local foods, and improvement of the health and ICDS services.

**Concern and Conflict—Women's Work and Child Health and Development** (Sponsored by Ford Foundation, 1993)

To evaluate the effect of the type of work women performed on the health and well-being of their children. Almost 300 women in eight villages of Kanakapura taluk were studied, all of them mostly from the agricultural community. Women were classified as self-employed, wage labourers, unpaid family workers and housewives. There were few women in the first and last category and there was a lot of shifting from one category to another. It was found that almost all households were indebted and that the general environment and amenities available were poor. Using Weight for Age, Caloric Intake and Reported Morbidity of the index child as the dependent variables, multivariate analysis was done, revealing no consistent effect of women's work categories or time spent on work. It was suggested that the stringer effects of other

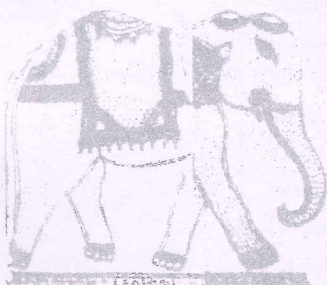
variables such as socio-economic status and caste could be masking any potential relationship between women's work and child well-being in this study.

**Evolving a Women Sensitive Population Policy** (Sponsored by UNFPA, 1993-95)

Analysed different aspects of general health issues and reproductive health concerns among women with a view to evolve a Women Sensitive Population Policy. The project was carried out in two phases. During Phase-I, a set of workshops was held to capture women's voices on reproductive health, contraceptive use and family planning concept. Rural women expressed dissatisfaction about the existing family planning programme run by the government and the various other constraints that women face to exercise their reproductive rights. This prompted ISST to conduct a survey to record the experiences more systematically in Phase-II. Around 800 women and 200 men in different urban locations of Delhi and Bangalore and rural locations of Madhya Pradesh and Kumaon hills were interviewed using questionnaires on a range of issues such as health status of the family, with special reference to reproductive health of women, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, sexual negotiations within the family. A qualitative assessment of the information generated by the survey and focus group discussions in the survey locations brought out in sharp focus the nature of the constraints under which women have to make choices.

**Research and Advocacy Programme on Poverty, Gender Inequality and Reproductive Choice** (Sponsored by MacArthur Foundation, 1993-95)

The study suggested policies and programme strategies which allow poor women to make reproductive choices and plan for the care of their children under a climate free of political and cultural compulsions. The study was designed to have an in-depth household survey to collect information regarding family structure, economic situation, time allocation, demographic behaviour and attitudes. About





800-1000 families participated in the survey. Time allocation data on childcare responsibilities gathered during the data collection was actually useful to understand the gender differentiated role, of both parents. After a year a revisit to sample (ten per cent of the total) was done to note the changes in certain behaviour such as attitude regarding child bearing/rearing, the perceived parental and marital responsibilities and the extent of obtaining family planning services with special reference to the social and cultural context within and outside the family.

**Income and Nutrition Effects of Shifts From Subsistence to Cash Cropping, especially on the Poor Farmers, Women and Children** (Sponsored by Indian Council of Agricultural Research, 1994)

This case study in Karnataka, examines, describes and measures the impact of shifting cropping patterns on the health and nutrition status of poor farmers in particular. By tracing and analyzing the complex link from the cause to the effect, the study finds that in general, the shifts from subsistence to commercial farming have benefited agricultural households, but, their impact on the income, consumption, food security, health and nutrition of different strata of farming households seem to be different. Recommendations include, paying greater attention to ensure adequate supply of food grains since commercialisation has created an overall shortage; assisting small and marginal farmers who have benefited unequally from the shift; and taking special measures for the poorest, both at the ground and policy levels.

### **Family Counselling Centre**

In 1980 ISST established itself as a research institute with special interest in issues related to women. It was felt that the institute should also involve itself in activism where distressed women could seek redressal of different kinds. Meanwhile, the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was looking for volunteers from different organisations (NGOs) who could be

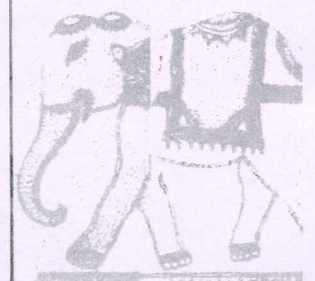
trained in counselling to help women victims of dowry, domestic violence etc. On CSWB's request, ISST too sent two volunteers for training in counselling. The counsellors attended a two-week training programme and later had to volunteer time at the CSWB every week to assist in handling cases. This happened between 1982-83. In 1984 the CSWB decided to give grants to various NGOs to run family counselling centres. ISST was selected as one of the grantees in 1984 and continued to receive the grant till 2000.

**Documentation and Research on Family Counselling Centre** (Sponsored by Department of Women & Child Development, Ministry of Human Resources Development, 1995-96)

The project documented the cases handled at ISST since the inception of the counselling centre in 1985, with a view to facilitate the understanding of the dynamics of the family, the woman and her position within the family and how the family as an institution helps in resolving the crises that women face. Since 1994 was declared the year of the family, the family as an institution was being discussed in detail in different forums. Over the years ISST dealt with nearly 400 cases and the information on these was analysed keeping in mind the socio-economic status of the families and by the problems faced.

**Designing A Reproductive Health Strategy using Local Structures of Governance in India** (Sponsored by MacArthur Foundation, 1996-98)

The aim of the project was to activate local structures of governance for improving the delivery of health services in general and reproductive health services for women in particular. The study was carried out in three states in collaboration with three local NGOs: Leading Organisations for Rural Development (LORD) in Bellary district of Karnataka, Social Uplift through Rural Action (SUTRA) in Solan district of Himachal Pradesh and Child in Need Institute (CINI) in South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. An essential component of the project was to form linkages between the





community, the elected representatives of panchayats, the line ministries and the bureaucracy in order to ensure that health care service become more responsive to the needs of the community. ISST had co-ordinated the project activities in all the three locations, providing village level information generated from the questionnaire survey to the collaborating NGOs in usable form to be used as talking points in village meetings and evolving an analytical framework for processing the information.

**Studying the Gender Dimensions of HIV/AIDS Using Community Based Research**  
(Sponsored by UNIFEM, 1998-99)

The study on gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS suggested that both biological and social reasons make women more vulnerable to HIV infection based on the information collected through case studies, interviews and focus group discussions among the people living with HIV/AIDS and their family members. Focus group discussions included men, women, adolescent boys and girls from the slums of Delhi. Meetings were held with bereaved families who had lost their main earning member to the virus. The case studies prepared were of the patients referred to a government hospital for treatment. Similar studies in other parts of the country were carried out by the North East Network (NEN) in Guwahati, Stree Adhar Kendra (SAK) in Pune and Initiatives for Women in Development (IWID) in Chennai and surrounding areas. The study recommended the need for counselling services in the hospitals for PLWH/A and their families, and intervention programmes for reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS for males and females. Gender sensitive sex education, and culture specific and participatory communication for information dissemination on HIV/AIDS, were also recommended by the study.

**A Cultural Approach to HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care: A Handbook for India**  
(Sponsored by UNESCO, 2000)

The study was based on a cultural dimension of sexual norms in different population groups

in India, their traditions, religious beliefs, concept of health and disease and perceptions of life and death. The study included a desk-based research with reviews of literature on mainstream Indian culture, family and kinship, gender relations, attitudes towards sex, and attitudes to life threatening infections in different communities. The data collected for the study used focus group discussions, case studies, and in-depth interviews. A variety of people formed the sample of the study such as migrant labourers and drug users from Delhi, Bedias community from Bharatpura district of Rajasthan (a community which is involved in sex work), devdasi community of Bellary district in Karnataka, and street children and MSMs in Calcutta.

## IV. Economic Reforms

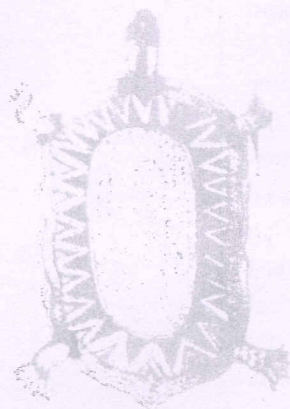
**Gender Planning Network** (Sponsored by IDRC, 1998-2005)

The Gender Planning Network, sponsored by IDRC was started in 1998, with expected completion in December 2006. Initially started in South Asia it was subsequently extended to include South East Asian countries to take forward the gender research agenda in the region in a co-ordinated fashion to investigate the gender impact of macro-economic policy reforms at the micro, meso and macro levels. The project was implemented in three phases.

The research agenda covered in Phase I of the project included :

- mapping and analysis of conventional indicators in five countries of south Asia in diverse area such as education, health, employment and income;
- developing non-conventional indicators of gender discrimination such as gender based violence, anxiety and stress;
- micro studies; sector-specific studies; household surveys to analyse conventional and non-conventional indicators and
- gender modeling.

The findings of the research conducted under Gender Planning Network, Phase I has





culminated in a book titled *Tracking Gender Equity Under Structural Reforms: Continuity and Change in South Asia*, Published by Kali for Women/Zubaan.

Research undertaken in Phase II included:

- at the micro level, household surveys were carried out in India and Sri Lanka in the households of workers, men and women, who have lost their jobs due to reform-related factors;
- a meso level study on the ICT sector was done to explore the gender-differentiated impact and growth potential of the sector in the region;
- on the question of the links between poverty and gender, the project introduced gender relevant modules in the ongoing poverty measurement survey under IDRC MIMAP initiative to monitor and measure the well-being of women;
- in addition a comprehensive survey on mental health and well-being of men and women in 14 districts of Kerala were carried out to gain insight into the issues related to the status of women. This was done since the state of Kerala has a high index of gender development but continues to have one of the highest recorded crime rates against

women in the country and Keralite women continue to be dominated by traditional patriarchal norms.

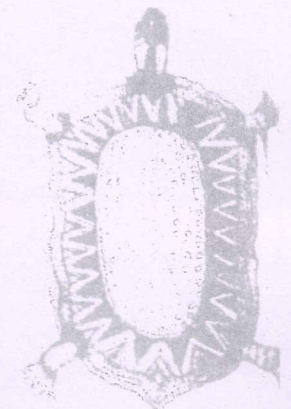
Phase III of the project includes:

- a study on poverty and gender in Bangladesh and Pakistan. The emphasis in these studies are on the qualitative dimensions of gender differences in the experience of, and the reactions to, 'poverty' in households.
- further studies in ICT
- gender training and
- gender modelling.

ISST in India conducted studies in Delhi and Kerala to study the gendered impact of ICT. In Kerala, it is the Akshaya project that is in operation for quite some time and people at different level associated (who provides the services and who takes the services with it) have been interviewed for the purpose. In Delhi, India Habitat Centre has a project known as Habitat Learning Centre which provides computer training to children from low socio-economic background. A number of psychometric tests have been applied to measure their abilities and results of these will be compared with those children who have not been exposed to computer training but have otherwise come from similar socio-economic background. ■

---

Based on a selective review of completed projects.





# ISST— Supporting Networks

ELA BHATT

*It started with a group of people all doing different things but with visions for change and the dynamism and churning of ideas that was created by meeting, exchanging experiences and ideas. For me, the importance of this network was the combination of research and action, and how research can help action. This is what I see as the base of ISST.*



I have known ISST for many years, actually even before it was formed. I see the beginnings of ISST in the informal network that was created in Delhi around Laxmibhai and Devaki Jain. It started with a group of people all doing different things but with visions for change and the dynamism and churning of ideas that was created by meeting, exchanging experiences and ideas. For me, the importance of this network was the combination of research and action, and how research can help action. This is what I see as the base of ISST.

Without realizing much of the significance in the '70s, of the joint action of research and struggles, I entered this network.

I had just begun to unionise the women workers engaged in the city's informal economy, and had formed SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) with the support of the Textile Labour Association (TLA), our parent trade union. Shri Arvind Buch, President of TLA often met Dr Kamala Chowdhry during his Delhi visits for the concerns of industrial relations and research. When she heard about the SEWA activities from him, I think, she introduced Arvindbhai to her friend, Dr Devaki Jain. Kamlaben also explained to me the importance of my organising SEWA. I listened to her with interest but I am not sure how much I absorbed from it then.

In early 1973, Devaki Jain arrived in SEWA at the invitation of Arvindbhai. I was not keen to have visitors in SEWA, however, I took Devaki Jain to meet SEWA members at their work places — markets, homes, footpaths. She talked and talked with everyone asking endless questions and noting down the responses. Instantly I was

drawn to her creative intelligence and we became friends, soon to become co-walkers on the path of the women's movement.

Kamlaben, Devakiben and, then, next I happened to meet Padmaben in Delhi. Padma Ramachandran was then, I think, Director of Women's Bureau, Social Welfare Department. I also met Dr Vina Majumdar, who was busy finalizing the *Report on Status of Women in India*. She brought the Women's Commission to visit SEWA. For me this network became a strong support in nourishing not only the SEWA movement but making the poor women visible, nationwide. Raising the wage rate of the headloaders, cartpuller and *chindi* workers; demanding vendors' rights in the downtown marketplace; accessing credit facilities from the newly nationalized banks for the poor, illiterate self-employed women—these were the struggles waged by SEWA, during those days in the '70s. And having Devaki as a sister and her network handholding in our struggles was indeed a great encouragement.

In those days, India was preparing for the first International Women's Conference in Mexico City in 1975. To my surprise, I was invited to attend the conference. I went with the Indian group of women. It was my first exposure abroad, a new and exciting experience! Devaki and I travelled together, stayed in the same hotel and began to feel part of the same cause that was, women of the world. It was an exciting time. Now I realized that there was a larger international movement that I belonged to. Devaki introduced me to many knowledgeable and interesting women — Gloria Steinem, Irene Tinker, Esther Boserup, Ula Ollin, Peggy Snyder, and many others. They talked with me and showed keen interest in SEWA. I was perhaps one of the few women who had already built an organisation of poor working women, a trade union, and a women's cooperative bank.

In a seminar during the Conference on 'women and development', Michaela Walsh, Esther Ocloo, myself and a few others talked about poor women's need for loans for their businesses!



I was more vocal as Managing Director of SEWA Bank. That evening, seven of us, including Devaki were having dinner together and talking excitedly about our dreams. Our dream was to set up a World Bank of Women! 'Why not?!' was the spirit in everyone's heart there. A woman photographer in the restaurant took a photo of us with her poloraoid camera and gave us seven copies. To keep up our bond, all the seven of us signed at the back of the copy, writing, 'Morning is at seven, God is in Heaven' (This photo is in the New York office of the Women's World Banking). Of course, it was Michaela Walsh who had the necessary wherewithal to establish Women's World Banking in 1980 which is thriving today in 41 countries of the world.

My feminist consciousness was growing. Particularly from the women writers and scholars in the Conference, I learnt about the strategic link between research and action. I earned a perspective to last for a lifetime.

Before taking up any activity, understanding the ground level reality had always been important to me and so in my work I had started with simple surveys to find out about workers' problems. In the Conference these studies were much valued. Devaki also had her book on *Women's Quest for Power* which included SEWA and other organising experiences in India. Here, I saw how much research and publications can impact people's consciousness.

I must say, Devaki has been always very generous with her time, and her attention and her contacts. In India, I kept meeting women involved in the women's movement through their research studies. It was a sort of caucus—Veena Mazumdar and Padma Ramachandran, and the younger women—Nalini Singh, Rekha Bezbaruah, Radha Bhatt. Some of us used to meet in Laxmibhai's office. Through these meetings, I also came in contact with the Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF). SEWA being a Gandhian organization, felt close to its approach and the organisation run by GPF. That was the beginning of other SEWAs in other states of India where ISST was like our sister.

My understanding on women's work too kept deepening. Those days, Devaki at ISST was doing an in-depth study on measuring the time women spent in work, paid and unpaid. The study was important in days when women's work was unrecorded in official statistics. The 'housewife' view of women was most common then. I was exposed to more such radical studies in India that helped women gain visibility and voice. SEWA has been one of them.

With all that was going on, the importance of having research centres dedicated to the cause of women became clear. ISST and CWDS were formed around the same time. They became a place where we often met, dreamt and acted. This was like a village well where women researchers, policy-makers and activists exchanged views and concerns. Women like us working at grass-roots—like Radhaben, Kumaroonissa, Runa, myself were carefully listened to, as researchers and those holding government office were all keen to hear what was happening at the ground level and through these interactions we also got to know the happenings at the research and policy levels.

In one of the meetings in ISST I said that SEWA members, hand block printers, known as *Chhipa*, were losing work due to mechanized cloth printing. ISST helped us to design a research project to investigate what is happening to this Chhipa Muslim community. The research showed that there were over 10,000 such skilled block printer women, who had to put away their blocks as the market was now being supplied by printing factories. We publicized this report and the Central Handicrafts Board offered to fund trainings for the Chhipa women. I had observed that there was still a good market for their traditional hand-made products, but their skills needed to be geared more to such a market. ISST helped us to write the proposal in the format required by the Handicrafts Board while giving training in writing project proposals, as well. Today the Chhipa cooperatives stand on their own.

Dr Raj Krishna, a well-known and respected economist was the friend of ISST and Devaki. I

*I was exposed to more such radical studies in India that helped women gain visibility and voice. SEWA has been one of them.*





*ISST was important to me at a time when I was developing something new, with little support and no road map.*



had the good fortune to first meet him at ISST. He was interested in my experiences on the ground. He wanted to know from me the income of agricultural workers in Gujarat, and what their working conditions were. I remember arguing with him why an agricultural worker cannot be classified in only one category as she does many other economic activities—dairying, weaving, construction. This was during one ISST organised meeting in Delhi.

While discussing the issue of famine relief, I mentioned that our village members had mortgaged their ration cards to borrow cash. During the days of consecutive droughts, SEWA Bank would give additional loans to its members even though they already had one outstanding. SEWA Bank never had any default in such loans. This became a policy issue at the regulatory level, and ISST helped us in framing the valid arguments to present our case.

Many of the pro-women policies of the government came through such discussions. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was a new popular government loan programme. SEWA had tried to take benefit of the loan programme, but the banks would not give loans to women. This was discussed by us and others at a seminar in Delhi. ISST did a quick investigation and found that the women could not borrow because their men had taken loans and not repaid them. The women's organisations had to work hard and long to establish the fact that women were earners in their own right and that if loans were given to them they would repay independent of whether the men did or not. The Government of India finally brought a subset of IRDP for women, named DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) which has indeed supported a very large number of rural women's groups in developing their micro production units. The self-help groups for micro credit that we see in the country had its roots in DWCRA. The DWCRA loaning programme brought out the importance of group loans and DWCRA was the precursor of SHGs. We were able to understand all this at that time because

of my experience with loaning in SEWA Bank which the ISST and other policy groups were able to analyse.

One of the important things that I brought to everyone's notice in those discussions was the fact that women are excluded from reaching markets. ISST studies also showed this. So ISST decided to start 'Mahila Haat' and tried to get women's groups to reach the markets. ISST gave Mahila Haat an office, arranged exhibitions, trainings, market research and links with the government.

ISST was always very generous with what it had. It had space in a prime location in Delhi and it shared that space with all of us. Mahila Haat had its office at ISST. When we started SEWA Bharat it was also given a room. ISST shared its government contacts liberally, it insisted that all of us should be included in government's committees. It shared its research and findings. It was a sharing institution and helped others to grow.

ISST was important to me at a time when I was developing something new, with little support and no road map. ISST was a relaxed place where one could say whatever one wanted without being made to feel 'foolish.' It was all women, and gave one a sense of belonging. It also was linked in to so many people and networks that it made one feel part of a movement. It helped to access policies and resources. ISST made me feel comfortable when I was new to the scene, feel a sense of belonging. CWDS and ISST are very close and helpful and complemented each other. I would take their help freely.

SEWA would have been ungrateful if I had not said all this for ISST and Devaki. We wish both of them a very productive future. ■

*Ela Bhatt, a Gandhian, is widely recognized as one of the remarkable pioneers and entrepreneurial forces in grass-roots development. She has dedicated her life to improving the lives of India's poorest and most oppressed women workers. In 1972, she founded the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a trade union of more than 700,000 poor women in India now.*



My association with ISST goes back to 1985 when I began working as Joint Secretary of the Women's Bureau in the Government of India. My familiarization with ISST was part of a similar process that I went through with many women's groups during this time. I use the word 'group' in the generic sense – they included NGOs, women's studies organisations, educational institutions, activist collectives, networks, and many others.

This was a completely new experience for me and it has marked a watershed in both my professional and personal life. This was because these 'groups' were not individualized or disconnected – they were not random numbers. Somewhere in the larger scheme of things, they collectively made up what is generally referred to as the women's movement(s) in India. I had not had an opportunity, in my working life till then, to work so closely with a movement(s). Twenty years on, this acculturation still continues.

ISST introduced me to the world of meaningful knowledge. The subject of women gripped me precisely because I somehow felt that whatever I read and heard about this subject was not merely "useful information". It did not just add to my repertoire of facts or data. It made patterns, it linked, it made movements and comparisons, it created lots of meanings – and above all, it somehow connected with my self, my persona. This was a new experience as well.

The birth of DAWN was a memorable event – so were all the preparations for the Nairobi Conference. ISST was in the thick of it. The Country Paper for Nairobi was being put together by the Women's Bureau but the individual chapters were being written by women's studies organisations. Editing was being done by someone with skills. ISST contributed some of the chapters. It was a good experience of a participatory exercise. Mahila Haat is another ISST endeavour that I remember from this period as well as the Counselling Centre. The two last mentioned being 'action' projects, gave a different flavour to ISST working.

## ISST—A World of Meaningful Knowledge

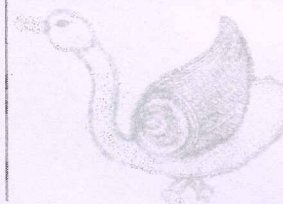
C.P. SUJAYA

During this entire period, ISST's forte was women's work – both on the research side as well as in documentation. The maximum help I was able to get personally for the Women's Bureau from ISST was when the new programme STEP was being conceptualized and formulated. Viji Srinivasan (sadly no longer with us now) was the third partner. I remember reading the ISST papers on the 'shed' concept of women's work (again, the 'grey' literature) and thinking to myself that here in these 'sheds' are the majority of women workers, especially the poorer ones. Yet the Women's Bureau did not have any programmes to include capacity-building and other supports for these millions of women.

The Bureau's programmes were meant – in those days – for working women in cities and towns who needed hostels or for women who were 'abandoned' and had become 'destitute' and needed to be trained in new but low value skills. Or they were for women who needed shelter from socially disruptive situations that shattered their coping capacities. In the second half of the '80s, there was just one new programme in DWCD that looked at the potential for upgrading women's technical skills in modern enterprises but even this found itself confined (naturally) to urban and semi urban areas. But lakhs of women, who *were already working* and working hard for sheer survival, were not able to get any supportive inputs from state agencies to upgrade their skills and earnings.

I took the 'shed' concept straight from Viji and ISST; in fact, most of the initial notes I recorded on the DWCD files on this new concept

*ISST introduced me to the world of meaningful knowledge.*





for a programme for women workers came straight from these two sources. Later I saw and heard Elaben talking on TV, about much the same issue – that is, you don't have to scratch your heads to think up new vocational skills and trades for rural women – they are already working somewhere, unrecognized and unlettered/untrained, with lakhs of rupees being already invested in these sectors by various government agencies, the only drawback is, the women didn't get to see the colour of this money. There were boards, corporations, cooperatives, federations and other institutional structures that were in charge of the seven women's 'sheds' that we finally included in STEP. But few people of influence in these huge bodies had thought of women as the real workers here, and therefore had not thought of investing in their 'human development' or in developing their capabilities.

When the programme was cleared by the Government of India, I remember Viji bringing a cake on which was inscribed "STEP" (in chocolate icing) for all of us to celebrate the occasion.

Later on, I heard from Devaki and others, how DWCRA was considerably influenced by the research and action done with women at the grass-roots level. At the time DWCRA was launched I was still in Himachal. Even at that time, I remember wondering to myself how such a design got into the IRDP stable. To me it (I was Secretary Planning then, in the state) it appeared so difficult to talk to others on how to form a DWCRA group. I remember a particular BDO, who when I asked him how he did it, told me he just listed the names of 20 village women on a piece of paper – and the group was made. He showed me the list. Later on, when I joined in the Women's Bureau in Delhi, D. Bandhopadyay agreed with me that DWCRA was a 'very ambitious' project.

After my stint in the Women's Bureau, I spent some time (whole-time, on study leave) with ISST. Here I was able to observe at first hand, how the organisation worked and indeed I felt I had become a part of it, yet was an outsider too. The ISST office was then in Deen Dayal Upadhyay

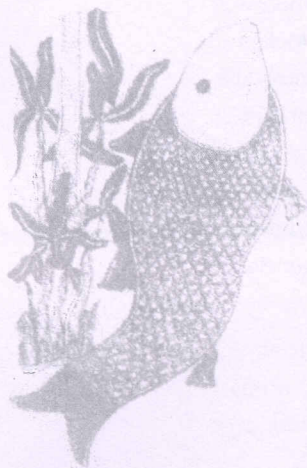
Marg, mainly consisting of one long room with all of us piled in, sitting across each other behind tables full of books and papers. I remember Devaki, making a virtue of necessity, saying that the seating arrangements in ISST are meant to encourage face-to-face interaction with no hierarchy or pecking order!

There was Pushpa, who 'drove' the office, who was always there, at whatever time of the day it was, in her usual place (actually, she rarely sat, she moved around the whole time) and managing everything with her quiet efficiency and her broad smile. Only her photograph is there now, in the new ISST office to remind us of her.

I did several different sorts of work sitting in ISST – some writing, a good deal of preparation for the Mysore IAWS Conference – because both Devaki and I were elected office bearers during that period. I wrote on the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme based on earlier evaluations done by Chaya Datar and others. I read enormously during that period, dipping into the 'grey' literature stored in the cupboards that ISST was so proud of. The year 1991 saw the new economic policies being put in place. There were a lot of nervous expectations and apprehensions at this time. ISST ran a workshop and brought out a publication. I did a literature survey for this publication on the impact of SAP on women and children. One thing many of us learnt was that there is no point in looking at other country experiences (who had gone through SAP earlier than India) to serve as an early warning system for us. Every country has to re-invent the wheel and learn its own lessons.

The end of this period saw Vimala Ramachandran and me join to formulate a strategic planning and review exercise of ISST for the Ford Foundation.

One of the questions that I find myself asking – then and now – is why more use of research on women's work and other related themes could not be made, and why this body of work did not impact more significantly on policy. An answer to this question has eluded me up to now.





ISST's contribution to the subject of women's work, for example, why don't we see much more of it reflected in development practices? I found very early on, that my questions on this topic did not elicit any clear answers from the researchers. (It did not deserve an answer?) The family of social science researchers did not seem to be overly bothered about the gap.

I realized that mine was indeed a naive question. Social science research, including women's studies and research had its own *raison d'être*, its own rationale for existence. It was just that I was a civil servant, that I thought there was an absolute and integral connection.

On the 'other side', I was becoming used to the sight of large numbers of research reports piling up in the cupboards in government offices. Many of them were funded by the state agencies themselves. Here again, there was an implicit and unspoken understanding that the completion of the research marked the end of the cycle. This barrier also could not be broken.

But stubbornly, I still believe that research can and should impact policy much more significantly, both in broad terms as well as in 'devil is in the detail' terms. Of course I am acclimatized to the kind of research that institutions like ISST produce. I see this body of knowledge as policy oriented research and that is the extent of my involvement in and knowledge of research. My remarks are not aimed at academic or other kinds of scientific or other research, with which I am completely unfamiliar.

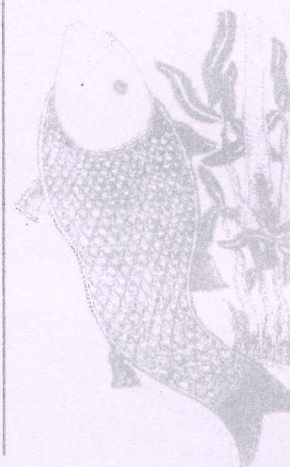
I see such a strong interface between what state agencies do – not only in the narrowly defined term 'development' – but in so many other sectors such as human and legal rights or law and order, violence, and the work that ISST and other groups do.

I think of ISST as a potential *sutradhar*, being able to give a kind of running commentary on women (or the more fashionable word 'gender') and development to state agencies for their use. I see a greater role for institutional policy analysis. We do need policy analysts and policy analysis. At present, there is really no space within state agencies for these. Is it because there is no perceived need, or is it a power dynamic? Perhaps the answer is yes to both questions, because they mean the same. I also think that such a connection cannot come about by itself – it has to be worked *on* and worked *towards*. There is a need for proactive efforts from the community of researchers to increase the utilization of research outputs.

One remembers the Raj Krishna-coined adjective "knowledge proof" and more recently, the title of one of Devaki's lectures 'Knowledge as Waste'. It is perhaps tempting to become cynical and negative at this point on future prospects. But I would still prefer to be hopeful. ■

*C.P. Sujaya is currently a visiting fellow in CWDS and a member of the executive committee of CWDS. She has been working on gender issues and has been associated with various women's organisations for more than twenty years. Prior to this she has served the Indian Administrative Service in Himachal Pradesh and Delhi.*

*I think of ISST as a potential sutradhar, being able to give a kind of running commentary on women and development to state agencies for their use.*





# ISST in Bangalore

K.S. KRISHNASWAMY

*It was a small compact unit, friendly, and informal; and the staff members were all competent and committed. As the unit's work increased, others came in as consultants or as regular staff for short periods.*

**M**y association with ISST Bangalore started after I retired from the Reserve Bank of India in 1981 and settled down here. It was then housed in a part of 'Tharanga', the lovely lakeside estate of Mr Srinivasan, Devaki's father. Besides Devaki, its Director, the unit had a staff of three to four professionals and a small secretariat. I was a part time Adviser and Devaki's father, a distinguished administrator, was a caring *paterfamilias*. It was a small compact unit, friendly, and informal; and the staff members were all competent and committed. As the unit's work increased, others came in as consultants or as regular staff for short periods.

Coming as I did from the mundane world of central banking and macro economics, it was exciting to sit with young women and men working on live problems of women, children and other disadvantaged members of society. Besides the micro nature of the projects, they involved reaching out to the households and real people. In reality, I learnt much from the work which ISST was engaged in and came to understand better the nature of ground-level operations, after years of dealing with rules and regulations, policies and paradigms and national and international organisations.

Bangalore was at that time very different from the hugely grown silicon city it is now. It was greener and more salubrious and commuting was a lot easier. Government offices and other institutions were very accessible and it did not take long for ISST or me to settle down to serious work. Since Devaki was the common director for both the Delhi and Bangalore offices of ISST, the latter had ample resources and direction for work. Within a couple of years of its coming into being, ISST-Bangalore had a slew of interesting projects to engage everybody fully.

The projects consisted principally of issues relating to women and children, especially in rural areas, in the context of changes in their social, economic and political environment. They ranged from integrated child development at one end to the impact of policy or technology changes

on working women and their status in society and family. After the mid 1980s when Panchayats came into being in Karnataka, a good part of ISST's work turned to the study as well as training of elected women representatives (EWR's), especially in Gram Panchayats. Active engagement in these areas involved field studies, workshops and melas, for EWRs, meetings with local officials and community leaders and so on – all so different from esoteric discussion with bankers and their customers. There was also plenty of desk research for collection and analysis of secondary data at regional or national, even international, levels.

Virtually all of the projects taken up by ISST involved field investigations for collection of primary data from households or local agencies. It was not always easy to reach the villages or interview officials and members of households, who were often resentful and even hostile. But the staff soon learnt to be patient and persistent and they succeeded in collecting a great deal of useful data on women and their problems. The field studies were usually from a sample of households and included both qualitative and quantitative information. While all this may not have been suitable for generalized inferences for larger entities, they constituted useful case studies answering specific questions. They also provided rich material for training as well as for some of the activist programmes in which ISST participated.

Over the years, women's studies and decentralized governance have become subjects of importance and many other NGOs are now active in these areas. In consequence, there is increasing competition for both resources and trained personnel. ISST-B found it increasingly difficult to secure adequate funding or retain its professional staff. There were also administrative changes in both Delhi and Bangalore which affected it. Long term planning of research or engaging adequate core staff became problematic. There was little I could do to change things and when it was necessary for me to go abroad for a stretch, I took leave of the unit. ■

*K.S. Krishnaswamy served as Economic Advisor, Planning Commission (1964-67) and Director, Economic Development Institute, World Bank (1967-72) prior to returning to RBI as Principal Adviser. He retired as Deputy Governor in 1981 and was thereafter technical consultant to ISST, Bangalore (1981-2000) where his main concerns were Panchayat Raj and women's issues.*





When my friend, Ratna Sudarshan (now Director of ISST) asked me to write about my experience at ISST, it was like turning the clock back some 28 years. I had just completed my Masters in Sociology and was debating whether to continue with a M.Phil when a friend suggested I go and meet Mrs Devaki Jain.

Twenty-eight years is a long time but it seems like it was just the other day when I walked into Devaki's residence at Jor Bagh. She had just compiled and edited a volume called, *Indian Women* for the Publication Division, Government of India and her paper, "From Disassociation to Rehabilitation" on SEWA. Full of energy and enthusiasm she was keen to do more case studies like SEWA. Warm, bright and encouraging she was also very convincing and brimming with ideas and plans. She had just submitted a proposal on a Time Allocation study to the ICSSR and persuaded me to join her in these two research projects. I also had the good fortune of meeting Nalini Singh who was going to work as a Consultant. The three of us worked together in the initial years at ISST.

The Institute of Social Studies (ISS), as it was known then, was started in a small bedroom which was converted into an office. It comprised of two desks, two typewriters, a phone, few files, documents and books. It amazes me how we could manage to work through the buzz of activity that took place throughout the day.

I am happy that from this little room, ISST has expanded to a large office located at the India Habitat Centre and its activities spread to documentation, research, advocacy and family counselling. It also has an office in Bangalore and has emerged as one of the premier institutions of gender based research. I was indeed fortunate to be one of its first associates and was with them for over six years.

One of the first studies undertaken by ISST was the Time Allocation study of men, women and children in rural households in six villages in Rajasthan and West Bengal, conducted in 1976-77. Funded by the ICSSR it was a pioneering

## ISST—Some Recollections

MALINI CHAND SHETH

work with researchers actually living in the village and observing the activities of men, women and children throughout the day. The hypothesis of the study was that female work participation rates are underestimated in India due to what is perceived as measurement failure. The study revealed that amongst the poor the difference in work participation rates of women was far greater compared to the official census, than that of men. It also revealed that children, especially female children, engaged in significant economic activities often working for long hours.

We went to Bharatpur, Rajasthan in October 1976 and with the assistance of the NSS staff selected the villages and canvassed one twist census. It was interesting to note that we got completely wrong and misleading data due to the family planning drive that was on at that time. We learnt how important it was to first establish a rapport with the villagers and understand village dynamics. We had to go a second time to redo the entire census to select the households that were to be observed. We followed the same procedure in Bolpur district, West Bengal.

ISST got a great deal of credibility as a result of this study. It had notable policy and conceptual implications. It was well received by government, NGOs and research institutes. ISST got known for its expertise in preparing schedules and collecting data, especially on employment. ISST called for all the NSSO, CSO and census conference data. We were able to make a lot of constructive and practical suggestions on the basis of our fieldwork experiences. The Time Allocation study thus demonstrated that through better surveys/questionnaires, women and children's work

*The Institute of Social Studies (ISS), as it was known then, was started in a small bedroom which was converted into an office. It comprised of two desks, two typewriters, a phone, few files, documents and books.*





*ISST gave me an opportunity not only to understand gender differentiation and gender issues of women's work and their contribution both within the household and outside, but also that women's needs are often different from those of men within the household.*



could be better reported. Today, time disposition studies have become an important tool for investigating women's work.

Simultaneously ISST also undertook its first case studies of successful endeavours where women in large numbers become active participants. The case studies were selected where women's work had been recognized and organized in order to improve their economic and social strength. This led to the book, *Women's Quest for Power*. Along with SEWA, we thought of studying AMUL (Anand Milk Union Limited) where women were engaged in dairying in large numbers with the help of Dr V. Kurein and studies from the S.M. College of Home Science Vallabh Vidyasagar. We canvassed a study to examine the role and participation of women in milk collectives. We observed that whilst it was the women who looked after the cattle, the spearhead teams often addressed only the men. Certain issues emerged from the study :

- Were the decisions regarding wage and dividends purely decided by the professional or did the women have any say?
- Would they not have preferred to be given a higher rate for the dairy milk rather than a bonus?

Women neither owned the means of production nor in most cases were they members of the co-operative.

Another area of interest for ISST was women and environment. While researching agencies that were working with the poorest women (leading to the Catalogue of Agencies prepared for the Swedish International Development Authority) we came across the Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangh at Gopeshwar where we developed two eco-development camps organized by Chandi Prasad Bhatt. The entire responsibility of running the household rests on the women — with farming, looking after cattle, collecting firewood all being women's tasks. The massive ecological destruction that has taken place has affected women most. They have to walk 7-8 kms a day and carry 15-20 kgs of firewood

on their backs over hills on slippery paths. This takes them 6-7 hours every day. We also observed that a large number of women had problems with their eyes and with the help of OXFAM we were able to install smokeless chulahs in five villages.

Another area of advocacy was when the Government of Jammu and Kashmir aided by UNDP wanted to introduce new looms for the weavers in Anantnag district. A visit to the site revealed that the new looms would help to increase earnings and improve the quality of cloth but it also revealed that the new looms could use only mill spun yarn and this could affect the livelihood of thousands of women in Shopian district who did spinning on a part time basis along with raising sheep. ISST suggested that these looms should not be introduced in large numbers as they would displace so many spinners.

ISST gave me an opportunity not only to understand gender differentiation and gender issues of women's work and their contribution both within the household and outside, but also that women's needs are often different from those of men within the household.

On a personal level it gave me a chance to visit the remotest tribal regions in the interiors of India and observe first hand the lives of men, women and children. It took me to remote regions in West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jammu & Kashmir. I learnt the skills of canvassing, schedule tabulating, research, report writing and analysing.

In working on the catalogue of agencies we had a chance to get to know Gandhians, social activists and social reformers — we met Ela Bhatt, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Kanta Tyagi, Parmeshwar Rao, Jeo Madiath among many others.

During the six years I was there I met economists, statisticians, sociologists — Professor Asok Rudra, Pradhan Prasad, Amartya Sen, Utsa Patnaik, Swapna Mukhopadhyay. We also worked closely with NSSO, Census and other government agencies. It also gave me a chance to interact with the Papad makers of Lijjat and milk



producers from AMUL, the spinners from Shopiyan (J&K), the tribal gond women from Netne District, the Chipko women from Chaushi and the *lifafa* makers from the walled city of Delhi to name just a few.

I moved to Mumbai in 1982 and wanted to do some follow-up work on some projects for ISST in and around Pune. Although since then I have not had the chance to work closely with them, I do know that ISST is doing well under the guidance of the directors who followed Mrs Devaki Jain i.e. Swapna Mukhopadhyay and Ratna Sudarshan. I do visit ISST from time to time and know that it still follows the objectives and ideals with which it was started thirty years ago. The last time I visited it was wonderful to see Sultan Singh with his characteristic smile

welcoming me to ISST. He is now the main office assistant and has been working with ISST since its inception. I remember how we looked forward to those hot cups of tea he served us at 222 Jor Bagh and did our chores so willingly. Sultan Singh is the thread of continuity at ISST and a reminder of its growth and expansion. It is today one of the leading institutes of women's research and feminist issues. I wish it all success and know that it will achieve ever greater success in spreading awareness and contributing towards women's research and documentation. ■

*Malini Sheth has a master degree in Sociology, (Delhi School of Economics), with specializations in gender studies and environmental issues. She has done voluntary work in Mumbai with Centre for Education and Documentation and Foundation for Medical Research. She has also been associated with Ekatra.*





# Reminiscences of Early Years at ISST

REKHA BEZBORUAH

*ISST has many 'firsts' to its credit, which are now being discussed again in different formats, under different rubrics.*

**C**ongratulations to ISST on reaching this great landmark of twenty-five years, of which I was a part for all of nine years.

I joined ISS (the T came later) in April 1979, straight from the practical world of unpaid housework and bringing up children, into women's employment and gender issues. Devaki's world really opened windows for me into so many facets of women's lives. At ISS, my vague discontents with gender injustice found appropriate expression and channeling, for which I must thank Aruna Roy who introduced me to Devaki and L.C. Jain. Mrs Jain has been the mentor and guide of my early years in the field of women's studies, and I take this opportunity to say how many new horizons opened for me and many others who were working at ISST through our various assignments.

My first assignment was to assist in tabulating data collected for a study of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme, which Malini Sheth (nee Chand) was busy with (manually, without computers or SPSS). Reading about the discussions on-going presently in the National Advisory Council on the Employment Guarantee Act, I realize the seminal nature of the research conducted by ISST in 1977, in seeing the importance of the EGS in providing employment and food for work. An important finding was the large numbers of women seeking work on the sites. Thus, from a very middle class preoccupation with the issue 'should women work', one moved to the issues governing women's work in poor households: poor women's desperation to find work, to supplement the family income, of the existence of female-headed households, the role of crafts in providing a big



chunk of supplementary income, and the impact of national policies on women's work.

ISST introduced me to poor women: meeting them up close, knowing how they live, suffer, celebrate life even in the face of adversity, and bear their fate with stoicism, one understands them differently. Their right to a life of dignity is a concern imbued through years of working in the field of women's studies.

Other areas which had long spin-offs were Mrs Jain's deep interest in methodology and recording of women's work, the Economists Interested in Women's Issues Group (EIWIG) and the Development Alternatives with Women in New Era (DAWN) group. Many women from various disciplines were touched by feminist and Gandhian ideology through one or other of ISST's initiatives, and, like me, got numerous opportunities to participate in varied and interesting research and to travel.

ISST has many 'firsts' to its credit, which are now being discussed again in different formats, under different rubrics. For instance, strategies on how women organize themselves. At ISST, *Women's Quest for Power* was being edited when I joined, which documented women's organizations which have now become development models, such as SEWA, Lijjat Papad, Nupi Lan in Manipur and Amul. The other day I met a film maker, who had just won an award for a film on Lijjat Papad. I asked her if she had read *Quest for Power*, she had not heard of it!

A study on handicraft cooperatives was my introduction to the world of crafts and crafts-persons. Meeting Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya, was like a peep into history. She was over 80 then, and still resplendent in a stunning handloom sari, with her trademark jewellery: chunky beads and traditional earrings. Being at ISST, one was in the middle of a lot of 'happenings' without realizing it at that time, like attending the first meeting of SEWA Lucknow, when it was constituted. It was through an ISST project that Runa Banerjee, who was then working at Literacy House, promoting education among the Muslim women of Daliganj, was first inducted into organizing them around their economic activities, and from there to SEWA



today, its been a great success story. Today with the formation of the Federation of SEWAs, it now has 7 lakh members. The '80s was a period of many new initiatives and handloom /handicraft revivals of which ISST's Mahila Haat was one. Even today at Ekatra, it still continues to be one of our major areas of work.

ISST provided many opportunities to travel: to Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, in connection with preparing the Swedish International Development Agency sponsored *Catalogue of Voluntary Agencies*, one of the first Directories of its kind. Through the project, one met pioneering old Gandhians and activists, and people who later became well-known for their many contributions to development. One of them, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, won the Magsaysay Award and has now been awarded the Padma Bhushan. The time spent at his centre in Gopeshwar was a memorable trip, undertaken with Manju and Anupam Mishra. The whole issue of deforestation in the Himalayas and women and forests came alive after seeing the efforts of the Dasholi Gram Swaraj Sangh at Gopeshwar and listening to Bhatt ji's impassioned speeches.

A very enjoyable trip was to Betul, with Malini and Rakesh Dewan, in connection with a project on Social Forestry. Data had to be collected at night, when the villagers were at home, and we crossed streams, and went into the woods carrying burning *mashaals* for fear of bears. We stayed in a school in a little village called Sanwalmeda. I couldn't sleep at night, expecting snakes to hang out from the rafters at any moment. It was one of my first experiences in trying to cope with rural sanitation at a personal level. The concern of the village folk, displayed in their filling buckets and buckets of bath water for us spoilt urbanites filled me with discomfort at the thought of our wasteful habits.

At ISST, a lot of skill upgradation took place for us, the staff, and I spent a long four and a half months in Europe, under the first ISIS exchange programme in 1983, working with women's groups and NGOs in Geneva and Italy. I met many feminists grappling with similar issues across

countries, and made friends with women whose lifestyles were far removed from mine in terms of experimentation with single motherhood and gay relationships. Yet one could still relate to them on so many common discriminations.

With the DAWN project, one travelled to the most memorable of all places, the heady Women's Conference at Nairobi, in 1985, the most 'happening' place to be in at that moment in time. In connection with DAWN, one learned so much from the political struggles of many feminists from other developing countries.

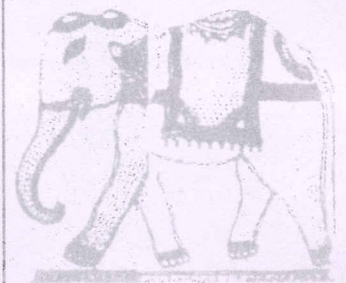
During my work at ISST, I met hundreds of NGOs and people committed to development, visited many villages, attended many meetings and wrote copious notes, many of which must still be in the ISST archives. We appeared to be quite a disorganized lot, with everyone doing everything all of the time—or so it seemed. Despite this, one tried to bring some order and system into the place. I trust that ISST now enjoys having its own place at the India Habitat Centre, having worked from all kinds of office spaces, starting from Jor Bagh, to Kanchenjunga building where I joined, to the Kamla Devi Memorial Museum.

One of ISST's most important contributions has been at the personal level: the wonderful friends, who have shared my life with me thereafter: Tara Appachu, Geeta Athreya, Rasil Basu, Malini Chand, Rakesh Dewan, Anupam and Manju Mishra. ISST also became the focal point for many other threads which were part of my life before I joined, but became even more deeply intertwined because of shared concerns and work: with Jayanti Banerjee and Bunker and Aruna Roy.

I wish ISST many more successes in the years to come: may it continue to provide leadership to the women's movement as it has done for so many years. ■

*Rekha Bezboruah is a Post Graduate in Literature (Delhi University), has wide experience in documenting the work of NGOs, in organising and developing projects for women, specializing in the informal sector. She has also worked extensively with artisans, been WID consultant for international agencies and the government. Since 1988 she is the director of Ekatra.*

*Through the project, one met pioneering old Gandhians and activists, and people who later became well-known for their many contributions to development.*





# My Experiences with ISST

TARA APPACHU SHARMA

*ISST was the perfect training ground for women who wanted to learn about gender development and women's issues.*

**M**y dream of becoming a development worker started when I visited the Sumangali Sewa Ashram in Bangalore which was providing shelter to the victims of domestic violence. Susheelamma and my aunt Kritika Viswanath were my ideals in this field, and I visited slums whenever I had an opportunity, to interact with women and children.

While I was waiting for my final year results, my friend Vijaya, Mrs Leelawati Chandrashekhar's daughter, introduced me to Mrs Devaki Jain. This was my first step in the development sector. My first assignment was to set up the Bangalore office under the able guidance of Dr Krishnaswamy (former Deputy Governor of RBI) and Mrs Devaki Jain. Their support and direction provided me to understand the nuances of development processes.

Working with artisans and women producers, under the Mahila Haat project of ISST, gave me an in-depth insight into marketing skills and the importance of a professional business outlook to carry out any enterprise venture, whether by NGOs or individuals.

ISST provided me an opportunity to work with Smt Ela Bhatt [founder of Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)] and to establish a training centre in Kashmir for employment for women. The learnings were many and the most outstanding one being the importance of interactive processes in dealing with women who have never been exposed to outsiders or the outside world.

My international exposure through the Development Alternatives Women's Network (DAWN), an initiative of ISST, is still cherished and I feel part of it even now.

Developing a strong staff team is essential to the growth of any organisation. As I worked

with people in ISST at various different levels, I ensured that the entire staff including accountants and office assistants, would be taken on field work, wherever possible, to experience and understand the ground realities while conducting or implementing a project. ISST provided such facilitation in many projects thereby creating an atmosphere for developing a strong and committed team.

ISST was the perfect training ground for women who wanted to learn about gender development and women's issues. The exposure I got through ISST was varied and formed part of what was to become an integrated learning experience.

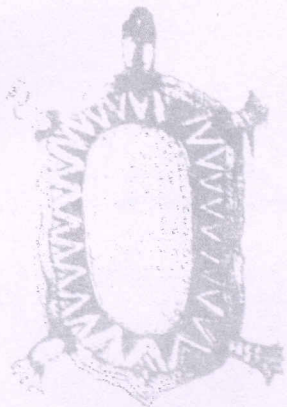
I used to resent times when Mrs Jain would force me to attend government meetings, when most of the time I felt I did not know enough to contribute. When I look back I realize it was a necessary evil, and in retrospect it has been very useful in my own development. I also initially resented working in an informal set-up without a specified work culture. However, I now realize this informal way of working also contributes towards breeding people committed to development work.

Working with ISST gave me the opportunity to choose the path of gender development in India. Setting up ISST in Bangalore gave me scope to hone my leadership qualities and problem solving skills, as well as helping me to realize the importance of rapport building with communities. Above all, it taught me to be a conscientious human being while giving space for other people's feelings and growth.

ISST gave me a vision to plan my professional career in gender development. I hope ISST continues to provide the same kind of opportunities to the younger generation so we nurture many more development professionals. My association with ISST remains strong and I view ISST as a sort of "friend bank" as I nurtured many long-lasting relationships, learning from their experiences, that I still cherish.

Wishing ISST all the best for their future endeavours. ■

*Tara Appachu Sharma at present is the Deputy Programme Manager at IFES India, an International NGO working on a Gender and Law project. Before this she worked as an Advisor at the Norwegian Embassy in Delhi for 14 years.*





It was a pleasant surprise for me to receive a letter from Ratna Sudarshan, Director, Institute of Social Studies Trust, saying that she is planning to bring out a book of 'reflections' to mark the occasion of the Institute's completing 25 years of its existence. This 25 year period may not be a long life for an individual but for an institution it is a substantial span of time. To have not only survived valiantly but to have established and sustained an identity of its own in an all-India context truly reflects unusual vision and commitment and capability on the part of the Board of Trustees as well as the administrative personnel responsible for its day-to-day functioning. One would like to pay warm tributes to all of them.

The Institute of Social Studies Trust — ISST, as it is widely known — has travelled a long way since its inception — in terms of time, space and arena of activity. It is about to celebrate its silver jubilee; it has established an additional campus in Bangalore; moved its Delhi office to the India Habitat Centre and has evolved into one of the leading institutions of gender-oriented research and advocacy in the country. I feel proud that I had the opportunity of being a witness to its formative years and also the privilege of extending my intellectual horizon through my association with it during those exciting early days.

I had come to Delhi with my itinerant family in 1974 and in the next few years had enrolled for a doctorate at the Delhi School of Economics along side teaching in a Delhi University college. Returning to serious study after a somewhat long gap was quite a challenge and my introduction to ISST at that point of time was truly serendipitous. For my research work I had chosen to focus on the economic history of colonial Bengal, one of my areas of enquiry being patterns of women's work participation from a historical perspective. I was told by my research supervisors that in view of my special interests it would be helpful to meet Devaki Jain, the Founder-Director of ISST. The meeting took a little time as she was then preoccupied with writing a book — as far as I remember she was completing the first of her many contributions to literature on women's development: *Women's*

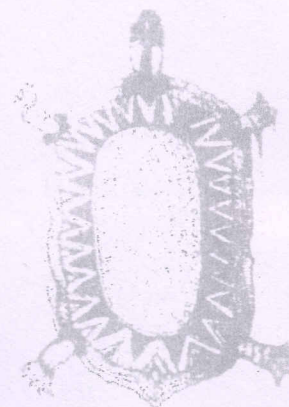
# ISST—The Formative Years

MUKUL MUKHERJEE

*Quest for Power.* When I finally met her, it was wonderful to see a warm, smiling, erudite but entirely approachable person with a special gift for building, motivating and sustaining team work. I was welcomed into the budding ISST family and soon became happily involved in some of its research activities. In those days the ISST office was located at 5 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, opposite the Gandhi Peace Foundation. It was a small place, overflowing with books and papers and abuzz with visitors and diverse activity. The staff was small but devoted and unfailingly helpful to neophyte researchers like myself. The fledgeling library contained interesting collections, specially project reports throwing light on women's issues at grass-root level and literature from important national and international seminars. Browsing through the stacks of material one could come across unexpected nuggets of knowledge.

On a typical working day the Founder-Director would be busy in her tiny cubicle, immersed in conversation with women who had come to ISST for the help and encouragement and wise counsel it could offer, the staff would be attending to various other visitors and more often than not, simultaneously carrying on preparations for yet another workshop or research project—and once in a while also tending to a small child whose working mother was allowed to bring her to the office as she had no other caretaker. The space was obviously cramped, and the financial situation must have been worrisome at times, but spirits were buoyant and one could not but be affected by the unmistakable ethos of commitment to the cause of the deprived segments of our society — a commitment so ably and lovingly nurtured by the then Director.

*It was a small place, overflowing with books and papers and abuzz with visitors and diverse activity. The staff was small but devoted and unfailingly helpful*





Most of us are now conscious of the pervasive problem of undervaluing women's contribution to society as captured in the eloquent pointers emerging from the Copenhagen Mid-Decade Conference on Women, 1980:

- Women are half the world's population
- They work two-third of the hours worked in the world but only a third is registered as work
- For all this women earn a tenth of the world's income and are registered as owners of one-tenth of the world's property

It is instructive to remember that the issue of proper recognition and enumeration of women's work became a vital part of ISST's research and advocacy agenda right from its inception. *The Human Development Report* of 1995 records: "Women's work is greatly undervalued in economic terms. This is due in part to the restricted definition of economic activity. But part of the problem is the notion of value itself...many goods and services with economic value are not marketed ...The total product of society is thus underestimated — and the economic contribution of many people, specially women, are unrecognised and unrewarded...unpaid work goes far beyond housekeeping and its omission leaves a major gap in national accounting..."<sup>1</sup>

It was as a response to these fundamental concerns that ISST undertook a special project of its own and designed an innovative time allocation survey (TAS)<sup>2</sup> — the precursor par excellence in this newly emerging area of enquiry, with notable implications in conceptual and policy planes. It is still worthwhile to recall some of the highlights of this study. In its 32<sup>nd</sup> Round (1977-78) the National Sample Survey (NSS) covered about one lakh rural and about 60 thousand urban households for their quinquennial data collection on employment/unemployment. In this Round the NSS schedule

was extended to include a special set of 'probing questions' aimed at exploring the nature of women's work and these were addressed to women who were described by NSS as 'engaged in household duties and also participating in specified activities for household use'. At about the same time, the ISST took up its own Time Allocation Survey. It canvassed both the NSS questionnaire and its own TAS schedule, in two villages each in Rajasthan and West Bengal. While the figures/percentages relating to male work participation remained more or less the same, irrespective of the method of investigation or the level of estimation, those for women and children showed marked variations depending on the methodology used in reporting work participation levels. It was clear that the more 'male-like' the activity pursued by women, the greater was the likelihood of their being recognised and recorded. The TAS revealed, for example, that about 30 per cent of the women who were reported as 'non-working' in Rajasthan according to conventional methodology of measuring work participation, were actually found engaged in activities such as sowing or ground nut picking or cutting grass. Similarly, in West Bengal about 20 per cent of the so-called 'non-working' women were observed to be engaged in various grain processing activities and were also working as domestic servants. The TAS thus demonstrated that it was possible, through improved survey methodology, to bring to light the hidden and usually excluded aspects of women's work and showed that both culture and class tended to shape the observed patterns of women's work. The interest generated in the utility of time dispositions studies as important tools for investigating women's work has finally led to the large time allocation study recently completed by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO), covering six states of India.<sup>3</sup>

Another landmark in those early days was a

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report* 1995, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Devaki Jain and Malini Chand, "Report on a Time Allocation study: Methodological Revision", paper presented at the Technical Seminar on Women's Work and Employment, New Delhi, 1982 and Devaki Jain, "The Household trap: Report on a Field Survey of Female Activity Patterns" in Devaki Jain and Nirmala Banerjee (eds), *Tyranny of the Household: Investigative Essays on Women's Work*, New Delhi: Vikas 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Govt. of India, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, *Report on Time Allocation Survey, 2000*.





Technical Seminar on Women's Work and Employment organised by ISST, with support from the Indian Council for Social Science Research and Government of India's Ministry of Social Welfare. ISST was able to attract a host of eminent participants: on the one hand a group of outstanding academicians from different parts of India and on the other, experts from some of the premier data collecting agencies at the national level, including the National Sample Survey, Office of the Registrar General of India, Institute of Applied Manpower Research, Operations Research Group etc. A striking feature of this seminar was thus the stimulating and, in those days, rather a rare interface between those who collect data and those who use them. Many issues and debates that came up in the seminar continued to reverberate and some eventually culminated in improvements in data collection, particularly with respect to women's work—one example being the formal recognition in census data of women's work in household industry. On a personal plane, writing-up the proceedings of the Technical Seminar was a valuable educative experience.

As it accumulated experience and expertise, ISST was being called upon to work in collaboration with premier international agencies such as the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation, International Labour Organisation, Economic and Social Council of the United Nations etc. Several special projects were undertaken under the auspices of these organisations which considerably widened its ambit. As far as I recollect, these included research on the domain of women-managed households with a special focus on female-headed households in India and on the situation of women and children in agriculture in India—representing areas where research efforts were few and far between in the 1980s. All these tasks were performed well and ISST went on to earn a Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Endeavours such as the Time Allocation study and the Technical Seminar exemplify ISST's role in advancing both primary research and

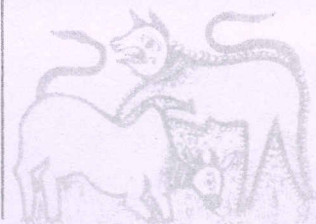
informed advocacy on behalf of women. But there is yet another dimension of this role that is equally valuable: nurturing latent talent by providing the needed support: space, exposure and practical experience, so that they could blossom forth as agents of change, articulating the basic values and concerns that form the foundation of a just and equitable society. Many of those who had their initial grooming at ISST may not have lingered long with ISST itself; but ISST can take justifiable pride in their distinctive voices and the contribution they have been making to the cause of social advancement from various platforms.

As I look back now, I realise that it is primarily through my interaction with ISST that I became more fully aware of the multitude of issues affecting women's lives and the manifold impact of gender. I have no doubt that this has been the experience of many others and I think one of ISST's important contributions lies in spreading awareness about feminist concerns at different levels, from seasoned bureaucrats who had occasion to interact with ISST, to rural women seeking support in their struggle against injustice and oppression. We often stress the need for changing conventional values and attitudes when dealing with problems of inequality and exclusion. I think, in its own unobtrusive way ISST has been doing just that—conferring broader concerns and sensitivities to men and women operating in different walks of life.

Since the early 1990s I have been living in Kolkata and have not unfortunately been able to maintain close touch with ISST. But I know that it has been doing well under the guidance of the capable Directors who succeeded Devaki Jain and I am sure that its foundational ideals and objectives are still cherished and reflected in the entire spectrum of its activities. As ISST proceeds to new thresholds beyond the silver jubilee, may it prosper and stride from strength to strength and may it continue to embody the same ethos and standards it started with 25 years ago. ■

*Mukul Mukherjee, Honorary Associate, Women's Studies Research Centre, Calcutta University*

*I realize that it is primarily through my interaction with ISST that I became more fully aware of the multitude of issues affecting women's lives and the manifold impact of gender.*





# ISST—A Wholesome Beginning

VRINDA GUPTA

*I have realized again and again that ISST gave me a base that helped me in every work that I took up. I will not be surprised if all those who moved on from ISST have had as good an experience.*

I have been asked to write about my time working with ISST, as it is celebrating 25 years of its role in the NGO sector.

Well, it was a long time back in 1982 that I joined ISST, straight after finishing my formal education. I joined it with the thought of using time while waiting for my results, but as I have always said, it's a one way ticket to the NGO world!

My work at ISST, as a research assistant, was broadly associated with the study of adult education of women which exposed me to the life of Muslim women living in Jaipur and the Chandni Chowk area of Old Delhi. I was also part of the study done on the working conditions of women in the fishing industry at Veraval, Gujarat. Apart from this were visits to Gopeshwar,

Uttaranchal, to study the impact of the cooking stove technology introduced in the area.

For me, personally, ISST turned out to be not just my first job, it was my initiation to work. It taught me complete work ethics and the importance of knowing your area of work fully and clearly. I got trained to identify my mistakes and effectively deal with them. The work environment encouraged me to come up with my best.

As is with all of us, that sooner or later we move on in life, I also left ISST after a while. Since then, I have worked with many organisations both as an employee and as a consultant, and learnt from each experience. But over the years, I have realised again and again that ISST gave me a base that helped me in every work that I took up. I will not be surprised if all those who moved on from ISST have had as good an experience. ■

*Vrinda Gupta worked in ISST from 1982 to 1983. Later she worked in many organisations such as, All India Women's Conference (AIWC), PLAN International, Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), SRIJAN, Mahila Haat, Society for All Round Development (SARD), RDAT- IIT Delhi, and Institute for Cultural Affairs.*





In India, as elsewhere in the world, the early '80s were a time of great ferment and creativity in the women's movement and in women's studies. New ideas, analyses, research insights and action strategies were emerging every day. The depth and breadth of women's oppression and exploitation in Indian society was being revealed with greater and greater sophistication and nuance – as also the strength and resilience of Indian women, particularly poor women, and their incredible capacity to act for change in innovative, sensitive, and yet militant ways. It was a time when those of us who were part of the movement, in whatever capacity, were filled with great energy and inspiration, ready to transform the situation of India's women – and our own lives – forever. It was an extraordinary privilege to be a part of this movement and this process.

For people like me, ISST was at the centre of this process – it was the place where we plugged into this great intellectual churning. At any time one dropped into the office – for a workshop or meeting, or even informally – there were always a host of exciting people to be met there, and stimulating discussions to listen and learn from. It was in or through ISST's events that I met many of the greats of the Indian women's movement – Devaki Jain, Ela Bhatt, Vina Mazumdar, Zarina Bhatty, Gita Sen... and the greats of the international women's movement – Peggy Antrobus, Noeleen Heyzer, Fatma Mernissi, Sonia Correa. I still recall sitting in the then newly launched Bangalore office in 1982, slightly overawed that I had to work with the famous Gita Sen, to analyze the data from a major field study of whether government services were reaching women and children in Karnataka's rural areas. I lived in Bombay at the time and was in Bangalore for a few weeks during the summer holidays. Over those weeks that I worked with Gita, we gave birth not only to various insights about the factors that determine women's access to public services, but to a great friendship and lifelong intellectual partnership that in turn birthed many other concepts and frameworks

# Innovative Courage: Remembering ISST

SRILATHA BATLIWALA

that still remain central to any kind of gender analysis.

I believe that there are four great ideas that ISST helped birth, nurture and embed in both policy and women's studies research in those halcyon days: (i) making gender discrimination visible in the country's statistical systems, (ii) counting and valuing women's work in economic assessments, (iii) championing women's political participation, especially in the reservation policy that became part of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments, and (iv) the importance of a Southern voice in global gender debates and advocacy.

## 1. Making Gender Discrimination Visible

Although gender discrimination was deeply embedded in every aspect of Indian culture, social structure, and economy, this remained largely invisible except in the regularly declining sex ratio that displayed itself in each Census. Women's relatively lower access not only to productive resources like land, but overwork and acute deprivation in basics like equal food, health care and education were actively contributing to this distortion, but were statistically invisible since data on these dimensions was either not disaggregated by gender, or gender biases in their collection and analysis were simply ignored.

Even in those days, India had a relatively advanced socio-economic data collection infrastructure compared to most developing countries—so data was available by gender, but not collated or analyzed to show gender differentials. I encountered this problem right at the beginning of my career, when I was working

*I believe that there are four great ideas that ISST helped birth, nurture and embed in both policy and women's studies research in those halcyon days.*





*ISST helped create new conceptual and policy pathways in recognizing the different kinds of work that women did.*

as a Research Officer in the Foundation for Research in Community Health in Bombay. I was tasked with analyzing the country's health policies and programmes, and whether these were reaching the rural poor. I found that when disaggregated, morbidity and mortality data from a local primary health centres clearly illustrated the gender bias: while fewer girl children were brought to health centers for medical care, much larger numbers of them died, in each age cohort, than boys. But this phenomenon was not analyzed in a manner that would bring these gender differentials to light, even at the local level, much less nationally. Even infant mortality rates were not available by sex in the '70s.

This gender blindness went uncontested until women's groups, with ISST in the vanguard, began an advocacy campaign with senior bureaucrats, policy-makers and statistical institutions to collect gender-based data (where this was not the practice), and to analyze gender differentials in existing data. Alliances were formed with key leaders in venerable institutions like the National Sample Surveys and Census of India, and they were convinced that showing gender differentials would not only help the cause of women, but actually improve the accuracy and relevance of their own work for national planning. So ISST can rightfully claim credit for having helped make gender discrimination visible in Indian data—and thereby having helped give India pride of place in having among the best gender-based socio-economic data in the developing world.

## **2. Making Women's Work Count**

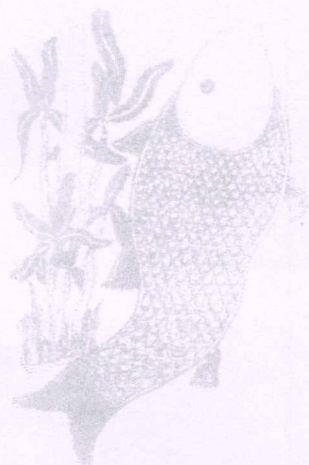
Along similar lines, ISST was the first institution to take fledgling work on women's time budgets (including my own) and mesh it into their larger effort to make women's contributions to the economy more visible and valued. The gender division of labour was a reality in every walk of life—yet economic computations like the GNP, GDP, and so forth never reflected the enormous contributions made by women because almost all their work was unwaged. Indian surveys of the economy of the time would

lead one to conclude that all Indian women were mere housewives—yet even casual visitors to the country noticed that it was always women, especially in villages, who could be seen in the fields, transplanting rice, tending crops, grazing animals, or carrying huge loads of firewood or water upon their heads.

The country's labour participation statistics were highly skewed since they counted only waged work. But since so much of women's productive work was unwaged, it was invisible, and so became invisible in the data. For instance, even though actively engaged in productive activities like agricultural work, weaving, and artisanal production, women's presence and roles in the labour force was often hidden because they were unpaid workers in family enterprises headed by men. Even women themselves rarely recognized or reported all the productive work that they did inside and outside the household, considering themselves subordinate workers and earners. Micro studies by ISST and other centres helped bring many of these factors to light.

At another level, ISST helped create new conceptual and policy pathways in recognizing the different kinds of work that women did: the now-famous "triple burden"—especially of poor women—or women's triple roles of productive, reproductive, and subsistence reproductive work, was little understood and largely undocumented in the late '70s and early '80s. ISST's research on the ground, as well as its focused advocacy with government policy makers and institutions helped ensure that gradually all these forms of work were reflected, at least through some key indicators, in the national Census, National Sample Surveys, and other official statistical surveys.

What is more important, ISST sensitized and partnered innovative economists and statisticians to find ways of computing the economic value of women's household reproductive work (gathering firewood, grazing animals, fetching water, etc.). This was a huge breakthrough, since until that time, such work





was considered the “natural” role of women within households. Exciting work from feminists in many parts of the world, including India, however, was demonstrating that though unpaid, this work had real economic value because it helped ensure that even the waged labour force could continue to work. A respected international physicist in fact compared the role of housework to keeping entropy (the return to chaos) at bay, and hence vitally important social work. Thus India blazed a trail in computing the economic value of at least some basic household survival tasks, and reflecting these in visible and serious ways in national production assessments.

### 3. Championing Women’s Political Participation

The struggle for women’s suffrage in Western countries at the end of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries was in fact an expression of awareness that without access to institutionalized political power, transforming the lives of the mass of women would remain a distant dream. In India, the late ‘70s and early ‘80s were a time of great investigation of this idea. Despite having a woman Prime Minister, and a number of high-profile women in politics, grass-root women had little political voice, and were largely passive, instrumentalized vote banks. Only elite women had had access to formal politics, and even they were not present in Parliament or State Legislatures in numbers that could make them powerful. There was a conviction, at that time, that if women were present in critical numbers in governance institutions, they would tend to prioritize women’s needs in planning and resource allocations.

It was ISST that helped merge the struggle for the decentralization of governance with the demand for women’s greater representation in political bodies. Thus, it played an influential role in the then Karnataka government’s reform of the Panchayati Raj system in that state, and influenced and supported the radical measure

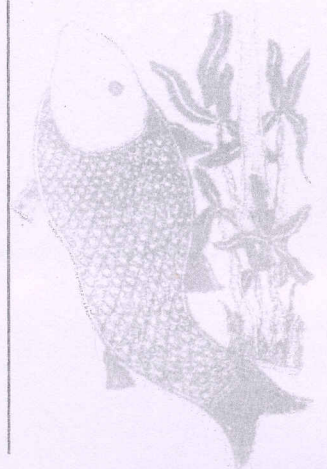
contained in this: the reservation of 25 per cent of all seats in Gram, Taluk and Zilla Panchayats for women. In time, the Karnataka experiment bore fruit and demonstrated that despite many problems and limitations, even poor and illiterate women Panchayat members could use this unprecedented access to formal power to promote pro-women development priorities at the grass-root level. News of the success of this state-level innovation began to spread, and many groups, including ISST, began to push for a Constitutional Amendment that would decentralize governance and revive the moribund Panchayat system throughout the country. In the process, the demand for raising the reservation for women to one-third gained sway, and the rest, as they say, is history.

### 4. A Southern Voice in Global Debates

By the early ‘80s, transnational advocacy and action networks around a range of gender issues had taken shape. Many were born out of efforts to influence the agenda at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, the first of many global policy-making spaces that the UN opened up to civil society. Others were focusing on sexual and reproductive health and rights, on women’s human rights, on gender discrimination in education. But by virtue of superior resources and location, if not an unwitting reproduction of colonial paternalism, these issues (including Southern women’s demands) were being framed by Northern feminist groups, and they were at the helm of advocacy efforts with multilateral and bilateral institutions, gaining legitimacy by virtue of their “southern” partners and members.

Many Southern feminists and their organisations were increasingly discontented with this state of affairs, questioning why our concerns were being represented by others, and the accuracy of that representation. Southern data, critiques and analysis were often at the core of the Northern efforts – but a deeper worry was that Southern inputs were being cast into

*It was ISST that helped merge the struggle for the decentralization of governance with the demand for women’s greater representation in political bodies.*





*Underscore ISST's role in effectively reading the global signs, and creating a space that helped a critical Southern voice to emerge.*

Northern perspectives and priorities. For example, Northern feminists were deeply influenced by the liberal democratic political framework, and tended to stress individual rights and freedoms. Southern women were generally located within post-colonial and left political economy, and their work on the ground made them more interested in community approaches and solutions. Similarly, many Southern activists were more interested in the intersectionality of gender with other forms of social exclusion – race, ethnicity, class, caste, religion, etc.

All in all, a real need was being expressed, by feminist researchers and activists in Latin America, Africa and Asia, for a transnational Southern network that could articulate its own analysis of gender concerns, and engage key global policy institutions with their own voice. Let me hasten to add that this was not an adversarial position—there was a clear recognition of the need to partner and work with Northern networks in a strategic way. Rather, it was an assertion of equal capability and difference in analysis and perspective.

ISST was among the first organisations in the developing world to create a space for the exploration of these ideas, in a historic 1983 meeting of Southern feminists from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. History shows this was the crucible from which DAWN was born—Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era—one of the most respected, sustained and successful advocacy networks of Southern feminists. It is not my intention here to credit ISST with the creation of DAWN – DAWN would have been born anyway. Instead, I want to underscore ISST's role in effectively reading the global signs, and creating a space that helped a critical Southern voice to emerge. That voice continues to speak in world fora, and I hope ISST continues to be a reader of signs!

### **A Space for Growth**

Looking back, all four of these are remarkable achievements, much more so for an essentially small organisation like ISST. But I

would like to end this reflection by focusing on a different dimension of that time in ISST that few may be aware of: how resources were stretched and applied innovatively to support young researchers and activists with ideas and commitment. Since I was a beneficiary, I will therefore speak of this from personal experience.

In the early '80s, when I joined hands with a small band of like-minded women to begin grass-roots work with an extremely marginalized population in Bombay city – women living in pavement hutments—we had no resources but our ideas, passion and capacity for hard work. Our conviction was that traditional grass-roots development strategies, of “entry-points”, and “concrete” services to help mobilize and engage people was not the way to go, because it created dependency on the external agency, and failed to truly empower people. We wanted to construct a process that is now called feminist popular education, using the Freirian technique of conscientization, where the only thing we could offer people was a space and new ideas and information, believing that on this basis, women could then frame their own priorities and struggles for change. We felt the goal should be for people to ensure that services and resources meant for them actually reached them, rather than providing substitutes. At the time, these were unpopular ideas with the aid community, and it was difficult to generate funds for our work.

ISST stepped in and supported me for a full year so that I could do this work full-time rather than divert my time on other activities for the sake of earning a living. In return, I gladly gave a certain amount of time to ISST projects, helping with data analysis and other work. I have no doubt, looking back, that this was an investment in a committed individual, made out of sheer faith, and because of the larger public good that might come from it. None of today's ubiquitous logical frameworks informed this support. Today, that early work with pavement dwellers has spawned not only



---

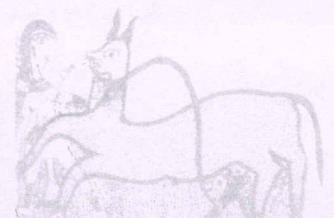
a mighty federation and movement of slum and shack dwellers in over 50 cities in India, but a transnational movement across 16 developing countries.

I am not crediting ISST for this powerful movement – but I want to acknowledge that that early support was critical in the nurturing of a fledgling, uncertain process that gained strength and momentum in the fullness of time. How many institutions, then or now, would take

such a risk or make such an unguaranteed investment?

For this kind of innovative courage, and for the pioneering intellectual and policy work of those critical days of the women's movement I remember—and salute—ISST.

*Srilatha Batliwala is Research Fellow, Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations, Harvard University, and Chair of the Board of Directors, Women's Environment and Development Organization.*





# Women's Work, Natural Resources, and ISST

PRIYA SHYAMSUNDAR

*ISST opened my eyes to rural women's needs and their dependence on natural resources.*

I have many good memories of ISST, which I joined in 1986. It was my first job and I am very glad that I started my career there. I learnt what it was like to work in a small NGO. I was an avid feminist when I joined ISST. My two years with the Trust taught me many valuable lessons about the challenges of working with other women on women's issues.

ISST opened my eyes to rural women's needs and their dependence on natural resources. My first research project focused on rural women and their use of non-timber forest products. I continue till today to work on similar issues. It has been almost twenty years and in some ways little has changed in terms of rural women's dependence on forests. I recall traveling to rural Karnataka to study women's collection of *Uppage*, a tamarind-like souring agent that was used for a variety of purposes, especially to cook fish in Kerala. I wonder if *Uppage* is still being

collected by women. Or have these trees been destroyed by a combination of increased demand and ambiguous property rights? Perhaps instead, *Uppage* trees have been cut down for firewood because new substitutes have resulted in a decline in its use. I can, of course, be more optimistic — perhaps women now participate in forest user groups and continue to harvest *Uppage*, but in a more sustainable fashion. I would really like to travel back to the same area and find out how *Uppage* and its users have fared — perhaps one day I will.

ISST was instrumental in my decision to work on environmental and natural resource issues. It certainly put me on a path from which I haven't strayed very far. I wish ISST and its current staff the very best as they continue to contribute to our understanding of rural women and the strategies that allow them to grow strong, secure and confident in their dealings with the world. ■

*Priya Shyamsundar is Program Director of the South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics. She divides her time between SANDEE and working as a consultant for the Environment Department of The World Bank, where she works on environmental policy concerns. Prior to founding SANDEE, Dr. Shyamsundar worked as a Senior Program officer at the MacArthur Foundation. She has a Master's degree in Economics from Delhi School of Economics and a Ph. D from Duke University. Of late, Dr. Shyamsundar's research and publications have largely focused on poverty and environment related issues.*





Celebrating the Silver Jubilee of an organisation pioneered by stalwarts of the stature of Devaki Jain, Nalini Singh and their likes is a matter of great pride to all those who have been linked with the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST).

The 20 years—1982 to 2002- of my 75 years—was the unique and most interesting tenure with the ISST that I cherish to this day. Personally, I have the most wonderful memories of that period that I could write a book on the encounters. An ordinary housewife, mother of three grown-up independent children was contacted by the organisation head through my daughter Malika who was doing her first project with the ISS. In February 1982, Devaki asked me to join on my own terms—which was three days a week, to make myself familiar with the working of the Institute and its scope of work—it was an eye opener.

ISST's work was an absorbing quest for an educated but under-used intellect. Not being a professional, I was familiarized with the process by young colleagues like Shobha Jaishanker and Suchitra who were experienced in research and documentation. With the enabling atmosphere and support from the dedicated members of the Institute, I was motivated to investigate the burning social issue of dowry deaths and harassment that had gained epidemic proportion during those years, and other negative social patterns and oppression of women and other sections of society.

In 1982-83, the Institute was still at its infant stage, with a group of enthusiastic social workers guided by seasoned economists and researchers. Its objectives being what its name suggests—to further the cause of positive social development. Contacts were established with like-minded organisations to evaluate the existing state of the social fabric and to make a positive intervention, the Institute trained its members with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Human Rights and para-legal courses. This helped focus my interest and was helpful in giving direction to my eventual functioning as a family counsellor.

# An Enabling Atmosphere

RAJ VIRDI

Before setting up a full fledged Family Counselling Centre (FCC) at the ISST in the year 1986-87, Manju Mishra and I were deputed to attend to cases of families in distress at the Directorate of Social Welfare as honorary counsellors. This experience of two years was the foundation of the Institute's Family Counselling Centre (FCC), which earned the reputation as one of the top such centres to be funded by the Ministry of Social Welfare.

In those 15 years as a family counsellor at the ISST, I learnt so much about the ways people learn to survive and was able to share with others techniques of dealing with crises in their lives. That process in essence was my role as a counsellor. Annual reports of the case-histories, activities, seminars, training camps documented the learning process over the years. This included an analysis of interaction with similar agencies, the legal apparatus, law enforcement people and the most arduous task was dealings with the funders. The range of activities of the FCC supported by a strong panel of experts established ISST's reputation to train students of Masters in Social Work. Seema Sharma was one of the first trained counsellor's from the Delhi School of Social Work.

Over a period of 15 years of my stay in the FCC, I had the good fortune to be joined by young enthusiastic scholars of related disciplines – psychology and social-work. The post of the counsellor being basically on an honorarium, the FCC could not attract a professionally trained counsellor, in spite of it being a reputed and well established Counselling Centre.

After completing ten years the contribution of the FCC to the stature of ISST needed to be

*In those 15 years as a family counsellor at the ISST, I learnt so much about the ways people learn to survive and was able to share with others techniques of dealing with crises in their lives.*





*By 2002 the FCC at Shakarpur had expanded its activities into a variety of welfare services, doing ISST proud.*

documented, which Shobha Jaishankar – in spite of her ailing health – very graciously opted to take on. The project was sponsored by the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India. Under her careful supervision, a number of young researchers and surveyors as well as the counsellors in the FCC had come together as a close-knit group, intensely involved in debating, dissecting, and analyzing the complexities of the case histories of people who had sought counselling assistance at our Family Counselling Centre. This was Shobha's last and most valuable contribution to the ISST studies. On November 5, 1996 Shobha passed away in Tokyo after a brave struggle with cancer.

After the FCC study done by Shobha, the counselling services offered by the centre were distinctly more professional and therefore earned a good reputation. It supported people from all sections of society – even providing police and legal support where required.

In the year 2000 the FCC moved out of 5 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, its office, for two months to 4 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg. This temporarily disturbed the services being provided to the people who were being helped. However, the image of the National Commission for Women (NCW), who had very generously offered to accommodate us, was not very complimentary to the functioning of an NGO,

that would not follow their bureaucratic procedures. So the FCC had to move its office further east, causing more discomfort to the people being supported.

This disruption of a very reputed and well-established FCC was caused by the funders, the DSWAB and the CSWB, both responsible for defrauding the already meagre funds allotted for rent, honorarium and essential welfare activities.

Eventually we were fed up of begging for funds and decided to discontinue our 16 year long association with the DSWAB and the CSWB in the year 2001.

The new address of the FCC was in Shakarpur, East Delhi, managed by Amita Joshi and Manju Mishra. I could only manage to visit India Habitat Centre (IHC) to attend to cases of old standing, until ISST could manage space for confidential counselling. By 2002 the FCC at Shakarpur had expanded its activities into a variety of welfare services, doing ISST proud.

I received 20 years of invaluable counselling by participating actively, or as an observer, in every project taken up by ISST during this period. I had the rare opportunity to visit a variety of social and cultural communities, which invariably humbled me and showed me the magnificent facets of human nature. ■

*Raj Viridi worked as counsellor at ISST between 1980-2002.*





When I met Mrs Raj Viridi, Senior Counsellor at ISST I had come to the Deen Dayal Upadhyay office to do an article for *The Pioneer*, on different facets of Indian women. Before that I had written an article on disabled women achievers, for which I had approached many women in Delhi. At Amar Jyoti I met an ex-employee of ISST, who introduced me to the institute.

As I was talking to two counsellors at FCC about their experiences, I saw a few children entering the office premises, and my curiosity pushed me to find out why they were here. And so started my relationship with ISST. I don't know what made Seema Sharma believe me, a young and totally inexperienced journalist who want to do something for these children but she helped me to see a different world—the world of the underprivileged. This is an experience which one can never get unless you are part of that fraternity. She took her maternity leave and so I was offered work as ad-hoc counsellor at FCC.

Those two years of my life actually helped me graduate from a woman to a person, who could feel, analyze and assess each relationship. After that I became a more sensitized individual, who was able to understand other women completely. Though I later joined a news channel where my approach towards life was more pragmatic but I always supported people who needed my help. The lesson to be empathic was always at the back of my mind.

## What I Feel About ISST

NIDHI SINGH

ISST as an organization has given me so much and the two years I spent there helped me grow and find myself. A person who is proud of her sexuality, herself, and helpful to many others who have approached her. ISST has really given me the strength and vision to look at things in their actual perspective.

I thank ISST and wish them all the best for the future, so that they could build many more like me who can go back and work for the society they live in. In the same manner as once Guru Nanak blessed a group of people by saying—*Ujarjao* (displace) to those who had served him patiently and humbly. They were astonished to be cursed so by their guru. Then Baba ji explained to them that he wants this world to be filled with people like them who can serve this world—the needy ones.

I wish the same for all the ISST workers, who are going to join in the coming 25 years. ■

*Nidhi Singh worked at ISST between August 1997 and December 1998 in different capacities as a counsellor in the Family Counselling Center, and as a teacher/educator in the informal teaching project. She has worked for Zee News from 1999-2005 and is presently working with well-known documentary filmmaker, Naresh Bedi.*

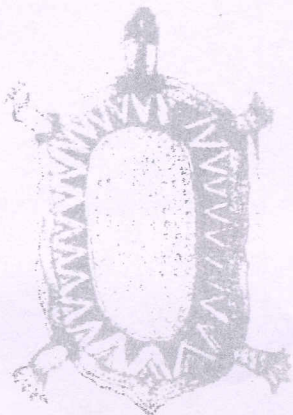
*Those two years of my life actually helped me graduate from a woman to a person, who could feel, analyze and assess each relationship.*



# Impacting Lives

SARASWATHY GANAPATHY

*And I learnt, in a way I never had before, the realities of the field situation—the conditions under which people live, the sad lack of access to services and information. But also that people who had very little would share with you what they did have – time, information, peanuts or tea.*



It was an interest in gardens that unexpectedly initiated my career at ISST. As my mother-in-law and I wandered around Mr M.A. Srinivasan's amazing garden at Tharanga, the little building that carried the sign *Institute for Social Studies Trust* caught my eye. 'What do they do?' I asked Devaki Jain. In the next half hour I had found out all about it, learnt of the network on Women's Work and Child Health, and been recruited as project coordinator for ISST's part of the network.

After fifteen years of hospital based paediatrics and a newly acquired Master's degree in Public Health, I was certain that I had none of the skills required for the job. To a large extent I was proved right, but after something of a baptism by fire the team, consultants and I found our feet. With much support from a range of people – at ISST and from the network – we made it through the years of the project, ending up with a respectable body of data, an interesting analysis of our findings and even a couple of good papers. And, more important than any of these, an understanding of the lives of women and poor families in the villages, translated in a form that we hoped would make it possible to affect policy that would have an impact on those lives.

Those years, however, felt like quite a roller-coaster ride – the downs had me swearing off social sciences research for ever, but the ups finally won out.

Among them were the contacts that I made, from whom I learnt more than I can ever describe. They covered an amazing range – people in the community, the field workers, other network participants, consultants, the whole array of ISST contacts.

Memorable interactions with some of them included working with an associate whose dedication kept her and me glued to a malfunctioning printer till 2 in the morning so that we could get a report out in time, teaching me that dogged perseverance pays off (thank you, Grace!). And there were the teasings and tuition of the field team which improved my Kannada, Dr Shanti Ghosh's enormous knowledge and concern about the health of women and children, Dr K.S. Krishnaswami's wisdom and insight into issues of local governance, Dr Jayashree Ramakrishna's unfolding of the mysteries of medical anthropology and her patient counselling when my impatience threatened to overflow ..... and a great deal more, far more than I can mention here.

All this taught me things that stood me in good stead over the succeeding dozen years. First, humility about how little I knew and how much there is to know if one is to work successfully in the not-for-profit sector. I discovered the many levels and different ways in which I needed to operate—the honesty of questioning, the negotiation in networks, the struggle with budgets, the rigours of analysis, the demands of report writing, the niceties of working with a team, the battle for funding, the "nitty-gritty" of administration and good accounting.

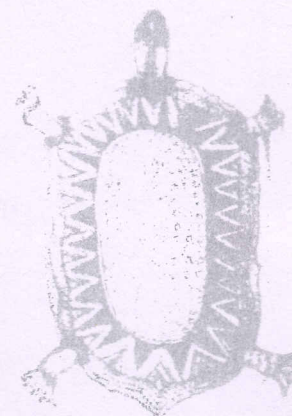
And I learnt, in a way I never had before, the realities of the field situation—the conditions under which people live, the sad lack of access to services and information. But also that people who had very little would share with you what they did have – time, information, peanuts or tea. They told us of their needs and hopes, the problems they faced – and I began to believe that I might play some small part in helping them solve those problems and realize those dreams. My time with ISST thus exposed me to situations that strengthened some beliefs and perceptions and, critically, taught me the importance of good evidence to back these up.



Finally, the ISST experience helped me develop the links and interests that led to my future work with the Belaku Trust. As we wage our own battles at the Belaku Trust, I have not been closely in touch with ISST. But I do believe it has an enormous role to play – indeed, an increasingly important one in the world today, where prevailing forces perpetuate disadvantage. I congratulate the group on this

Silver Jubilee and wish them many fruitful years to come. ■

*Saraswathy Ganapathy is a paediatrician/neonatologist with a Master's degree in Public Health. She is associated with the Belaku Trust, a non-governmental organization in Bangalore, India, which carries out research and programmatic interventions in the fields of health and development. Her special interests are the social and cultural determinants of women's and children's health and nutrition.*





# 'People Related Work': What ISST has Meant to Me

REVATHI NARAYANAN

*Those were exciting days with ISST participating in the struggle to put women's agenda onto the panchayat, to ensure that women got reservation under the provisions of the Constitutional Amendments.*

At the risk of sounding rather sentimental, I want to say that ISST holds a very special place in my life. It provided the space and opportunity for a 40 plus woman trained in the life sciences, who had taken time off for child and home care and was looking for a fresh start in "people related work".

Following a chance conversation with Devaki Jain, I was asked to come and start some work. Extremely diffident, I pointed out that I knew very little of the social sciences. My objection was set aside and I started with a delightfully vague part-time assignment, "helping with documentation". This lasted for all of 20 days. In end June 1992, ISST held a national workshop in the sylvan settings of Tharanga, Bangalore, to present the findings of the study of Mahila Mandals carried out by the Bangalore and Delhi offices. I was asked to be rapporteur, a display of confidence in my untried abilities that naturally put me on my mettle. I got first hand insights into the excitement of the struggle to get the Constitutional Amendments on Panchayat Raj. Listening to luminaries like L C Jain, K S Krishnaswamy, Arun Ghosh, Devaki, and Suman Kolhar was more than enough to get me hooked on the subject of women in governance. Everything I had been reading on gender and women's rights fell into place. Those were exciting days with ISST participating in the struggle to put women's agenda onto the panchayat, to ensure that women got reservation under the provisions of the Constitutional Amendments.



I read everything I could lay my hands on but I think most of my learning came from opportunities to listen to the best and the brightest in the field who kept going in and out of ISST - C.P Sujaya, Vimala Ramachandran, Srilatha Batliwala, Suman Kolhar, to name a few, people who continue to be mentors and friends.

Following up with the Mahila Mandal study, ISST took up the Ford Foundation funded project on women and governance, UMA, Utsahi Mahila Abhyudaya. The UMA project consisted of two main parts, documentation and training. I was given the responsibility for the Documentation wing and this included networking and advocacy. This gave me the opportunity to meet a large number of women's groups working on gender and governance. The high points were the 1993 Mysore IAWS conference with a plenary session on women and governance, an Asia level Conference on Governance and of course the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995. The project newsletter, *UMA Prachar*, was one of the first on women and governance. It was gratifying, when many years later, a very senior person in the women's studies circuit, told me how eagerly she used to wait for the next copy of the *UMA Prachar*.

As part of the project, groups from eight states, who had considerable experience working on gender issues, carried out interesting research studies on the situation of women in Panchayat Raj. End 1994, also saw ISST organising one for the first Mahiti Melas for women in PR. The UMA Mela was a big success, part of it captured in Deepa Dhanraj's film on the subject for the Department of Women and Child Development, *Itta Hejje Mundakka*. UMA had another success when a training manual developed under the project was selected by the DWCD, Government of Karnataka for distribution all over the state.

If one worked hard and showed results, there was the space and freedom to be creative and explore new ways of making the project work.

In the meanwhile, ISST as an institution was going through a number of changes.



Efforts were on to build a corpus fund and to set-up systems.

In fact, I did feel, at that time the lack of systems, continuity and connections between projects led to a number of missed opportunities for ISST. There was the usual problem that many NGOs face—trying to ensure staff continuity with time-bound project funding.

When I left ISST in December 2005 to join Mahila Samakhya, Karnataka, Ford Foundation had committed funding for the second phase of the UMA project. There were several opportunities for a mutually beneficial collaboration between ISST, with its research and documentation skills and Mahila Samakhya with its grass-roots reach and work on gender and governance. However, these ideas did not get translated into action.

It has been a pleasure to keep in touch with ISST and to learn about the several new initiatives that have been taken up in Delhi and the efforts to strengthen the Bangalore office. In fact, one

of my first tasks in my current assignment with the joint United Nations Project on Reducing Women's Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, CHARCA, was to facilitate an ISST workshop session on HIV/AIDS!

Looking back, ISST's strengths were the spread of its activities, from field based research, to policy advocacy, documentation and networking with a strong focus on gender. While we have moved forward on these issues since the '80s, there is still so much work to do. While the art of sounding politically correct on gender issues has been mastered by many, problems on the ground remain stubborn and resistant to sustainable solutions. There is a lot that an organization with ISST's history and skills can do.

With best wishes to the ISST team for a wonderful Silver Jubilee Year. ■

*Revathi Narayanan has worked for several years on gender and development issues. She has been associated with ISST, Mahila Samakhya and the United Nations Development Programme.*

*Looking back, ISST's strengths were the spread of its activities, from field based research, to policy advocacy, documentation and networking with a strong focus on gender.*





# ISST's Nurturing Environment

SHOBNA SONPAR

*Through the course of numerous discussions with the ISST team, including a year-long spell during which I had a part-time appointment at ISST, I was struck by the openness to perspectives from other disciplines, the curiosity about and willingness to engage with unfamiliar constructs.*

In mid-1999, while immersed in work at a psychiatric facility in Kathmandu, I received a call from Prof. Ravi Kapur who headed the Department of Psychiatry at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro sciences, Bangalore during the time that I was training there to become a clinical psychologist. I was bemused when he asked if I would be interested in working with a team of social scientists on a project concerning the impact of structural adjustment policies on gender related issues. What did a group of people working on economic policies need from clinicians like Prof. Kapur and myself? And for myself, how would this unfamiliar, even alien, area of economics fit in with my own professional interests? From my current vantage point, I can see that it actually proved to be a decisive turning point in the way that my professional concerns unfolded.

Gender issues as they related to behaviour and mental health had been an area of keen interest and therefore I agreed. Dr Swapna Mukhopadhyay, the then Director of ISST, explained that our task under the Gender Planning Network Project was to identify 'non-conventional' indicators of gender disparity in order to determine how structural adjustment policies might be differentially affecting men and women. The current indices such as the Gender Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Measure incorporated the usual indicators which, however, did not take into account dimensions that are especially salient for women such as safety and security, unpaid labour, household allocation of resources and division of tasks, the constraints on mobility, sexual and reproductive choice due to patriarchal

ideology and so on. Further, even in countries where women fared well on these conventional indices, they continued to experience substantial oppression, subordination and violence. Thus there was a need for indicators that would do justice to the peculiar realities of women's lives.

Academic psychology has tended to function in an ivory tower of a kind, feeling compelled to prove its scientific status by emphasizing empirical, objective rigour. In some ways, that has limited its engagement with the complicated, multi-factored, multi-layered behavioural phenomena that arise from, and recursively impact on, larger socio-economic and political processes. Perhaps, clinical psychology is less sequestered simply because it is an applied psychology, grounded in the concrete reality of people's experience. Being grounded in this way, clinical psychologists cannot escape an awareness of how human lives are all the time touched by social, political, economic contexts and processes. Even so, it was a challenge to take on the task set for us and to find ways to use psychological ideas to throw light on socio-economic phenomena. There could not have been a better setting than ISST to do so. Through the course of numerous discussions with the ISST team, including a year-long spell during which I had a part-time appointment at ISST, I was struck by the openness to perspectives from other disciplines, the curiosity about and willingness to engage with unfamiliar constructs.

The search for non-conventional indicators suggested that the psycho-social factors of subjective well-being and freedom from psychological distress in the form of anxiety or depression could be a fruitful area to explore along with violence towards women. There was substantial evidence that indicated that women compared to men have much higher rates of such distress, and also that this distress was related to a multitude of factors that are strongly gendered and reflective of women's relative deprivation, subordinate status, lack of autonomy, oppression and violence. Psychological distress among





women was an area that ISST had grappled with for many years through the counselling unit and was readily seen to be very relevant.

Subsequently, at ISST these psychosocial indicators were used in the studies that researched the impact of structural reforms in two different contexts. The first context was that of women entering the work force for the first time, this having come about through the creation of new employment opportunities in certain sectors due to structural reforms. The second was a study of mainly male workers whose retrenchment had come about in the wake of new economic policies. Apart from the fact that they used the non-conventional indicators mentioned above, these studies were special in other ways. Both the studies used methodologies that would provide quantitative as well as qualitative data in the form of intensive case studies and focus group discussions. In both studies, the target unit was the household and not just women or men. This provided a window into how families responded to changes that affected gender roles, relations and belief systems. The studies could thus be seen as falling in the gender and development frame rather than the women-in-development frame.

The non-conventional psycho-social indicators were also taken up by the other countries participating in the Gender Planning Network Project and were incorporated in different ways in their studies. At ISST, another research module was undertaken in the state of Kerala where conventional indicators suggest high status for women but where the rates of crimes against women, mental distress and suicide among women are also extremely high.

These studies have yielded rich yet confounding findings and have reinforced the need for explanatory models of gender and the impact of economic policies to take into account specific contextual factors. For instance, although women in the labour force work under arduous conditions, do not have control over their income nor share equally in household decision-making, the experience of being outside

the domestic sphere itself contributes hugely to their self-confidence and feelings of worth. Yet, at other levels women continue to participate in their own oppression such as espousing beliefs that justify their subordination to men, judge other women according to patriarchal norms, and uphold men's prerogative to chastise them including through the use of violence.

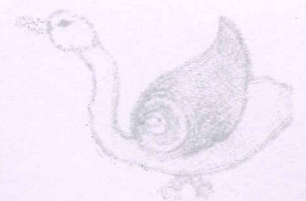
Working with ISST on issues like these has shifted my professional interests beyond the purely clinical to attempt to bring psychological understanding to bear on larger social issues. My current work in the field of social violence owes much to the understanding of structural violence such as that gained during my stint with ISST. This understanding extends to factors like the continuum of violence, cycles of violence, the internalization of violence and the role of power relations.

I have also been impressed by ISST's twin thrusts – towards academic research and towards practical community-based intervention. Although I did not directly participate in the latter, it was an inspiring and heart-warming experience to see that the staff, even when engaged in the data collection related to a research project, managed to make this exercise a meaningful and even empowering one for the respondents. Thus, a project collecting data on food security also became a means for the respondents to articulate their woes related to the PDS and ultimately to seek redress.

I experienced the work environment at ISST as highly enabling to researchers in that it provided a friendly, supportive even homely atmosphere together with a great deal of autonomy for independent thought and initiative. I know that it has provided a launching ground for several young people who acquired confidence and maturity of thought through their research and field-work on projects at ISST. ■

*Shobna Sonpar is a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist, now in private practice. She is interested in bringing psychological understanding to bear on social issues and her current engagement is with social and collective violence.*

*Working with ISST on issues like the has shifted my professional interest beyond the purely clinical to attempt bring psychological understanding to bear on larger social issues.*





# Placing ICT in the Discourse of Gender: My Reflections

SWASTIMITTER

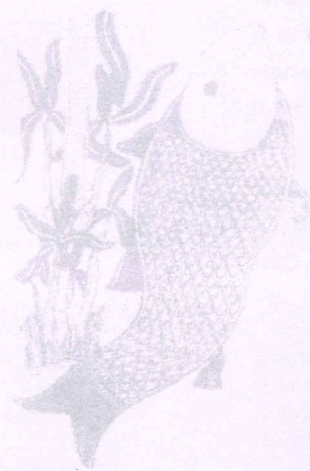
*Gender research at the grass-roots level by NGOs and community centres, I believed, was likely to benefit by adopting a more material and quantifiable approach; the research output from it then could enhance the lobbying power of those who wish to put 'women' on the policy agenda.*

**M**y link with the Institute is relatively recent. It started in November 2000 when as a visiting scholar at the Centre for Women's Studies at UCLA, I was about to start a project on personal history. It was to document my intellectual and professional journey in the field of Technology and Gender that spanned nearly three decades. This was going to be a reflective and reminiscing *aide memoire* for myself, but also for scholars with historical interest in feminist research. As I was to start on this new venture, Dr Swapna Mukhopadhyaya, the then Director of the Institute of Social Sciences Trust, wrote me a letter, inviting me to participate in the Gender Planning Network Project as a consultant; to explore the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on the employment and livelihood opportunities of women in South and Southeast Asia. The letter, originally sent to my address in England, got lost in the post, and was finally redirected to my host institution in the US after several months. But arrive it did and I found it difficult to decline the invitation. Dr Mukhopadhyaya accepted my delayed response and my relationship with the Institute started, lasting three years from 2001 to 2003.

I had reason to be interested in joining the Gender Planning Network. Its research had the promise of fulfilling one of my intellectual missions, to place the question of technology prominently in the discourse of gender. Throughout my career, as an academic activist, I tried my best to make policy-making bodies aware of the relevance of gender in the discourse of technology. These included the European

Commission, major UN agencies, and the International Telecommunication Union. It has not been easy in my professional career, I must confess, to explain to technology experts, as to why the question of women has anything to do with the issues of innovation and invention. It needed strategic arguing to receive acknowledgment that, thanks to economic and political inequality, technology affected women differently from men. In the digital economy it was access to hardware, software as well as to computer and English literacy that guaranteed effective participation by people as economic agents. It needed empirical research to establish that women visibly lagged behind men in gaining access to material and educational resources, and to prove that in the new 'chip and pin' economy the gender gap remained as visible as in the old 'brick and mortar' one: unless, that is to say, corrective policy measures are taken. Convincing technology experts of the relevance of gender in policy analyses, has been a challenging task. Yet, the converse was equally true. It was rare to find gender experts who would take on board the differential impact of technological changes at the workplace or at home. Much of the gender analyses were framed in terms of culture and other extra-economic factors; and did not explore, at least not sufficiently, the potential of technology in altering the structure of employment or the pattern of work. Yet it was the technology driven economic substructure that crucially conditioned the cultural superstructure. Gender research at the grass-roots level by NGOs and community centres, I believed, was likely to benefit by adopting a more material and quantifiable approach; the research output from it then could enhance the lobbying power of those who wish to put 'women' on the policy agenda.

The Gender Planning Network offered me an ideal vehicle for such a vocation. It provided me with an opportunity to interact with those who were exploring the impact of globalisation, both of labour and of capital, from multiple disciplinary perspectives. The team, with





researchers from a select number of countries in South and Southeast Asia, created the forum for assessing the role of technology in narrowing or widening the gender gap in economic spheres. My essay, posted on the website of the institute, has presented an overview of the problematic with special focus on ICT,<sup>1</sup> the main driving force behind the globalisation of our time. In this phase of globalisation, as my essay highlights, the region was playing an important role, with the highest rate of growth in the use of internet. Countries in it, such as India and the Philippines, became a focus of discussion in the North-South dialogue as a substantial amount of digitised back-office work, outsourced from high wage to low wage nations ended up here. While the North worried about the loss of service sector jobs, the South benefited in terms of employment. Women in this region became the major beneficiaries of these newly created back-office jobs narrowing the economic divide between genders. My essay on women call centre workers in India, based on the survey done by two researchers from ISST in 2004 documents preliminary observations on this<sup>2</sup> and is a logical follow-up of the work I did for the Gender Planning Network.

Benefits gained by women however have been confined exclusively to those who were privileged enough to have access to resources and education. Those who were at the margin of the mainstream economy, men or women, remained excluded from the opportunities that the digital economy opened up. The new economy has, if anything, widened the gap between privileged and underprivileged women. The digital divide has become more pronounced along the line of class rather than of gender. The question of material means of production thus remained significant even in post-Marxist analytical paradigms. This understanding, I

believe, has led to a more action oriented initiative at ISST in creating the community project in West Vinod Nagar in Delhi giving slum children, both boys and girls, access to computers and requisite training in cooperation with Habitat Learning Centre. It is with the encouragement of Swapna Mukhopadhaya and Amita Joshi, that I became involved with the vision of the Centre that aimed to democratise access to ICT, to children from the less privileged backgrounds, irrespective of their gender, albeit with an understanding that girls need greater support than boys to enrol in the courses offered by the community project.<sup>3</sup> The role of the Habitat Centre within the project validates the need to include the private sector in initiatives that help children of poorer backgrounds to participate in the digital economy, now and in the future.

It has been inspiring for me to be associated with the Gender Planning Network although I was unable to continue my link with the Network as I had to go back to my own long delayed project on personal history and time was running out. I, however, look forward to knowing about the developments and the achievements of the Network and feel confident that its research output will enrich policy-making as well as grass-roots initiatives.<sup>4</sup> ■

*Swasti Mitter is an independent scholar in the field of ICT and Gender and has contributed to the Gender Planning Network project of ISST between 2001 and 2003. As a consultant and as an expert, she has worked for and advised major UN agencies and the World Bank. She held the Chair of Gender and Technology at the University of Brighton and has held simultaneously the post of Deputy Director of the United Nations University for New Technologies from 1994 to 2000. She was a Visiting Fellow at the Science Policy Research Institute at the University of Sussex and at the Center for Women's Studies at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). She has published widely in the subject of women and technology.*

*The role of the Habitat Centre within the project validates the need include the private sector in initiative that help children of poorer backgrounds to participate in the digital economy, now and in the future.*



<sup>1</sup> Mitter, S. (2003) 'ICTs and Employment and Livelihood Opportunities for Women in South and Southeast Asia', <http://www.isst-india.org/Session III-Swasti.pdfv>.

<sup>2</sup> Mitter, S. Fernandez, G. and Varghese, S. (2004) 'On the Threshold of Informazisation: Woman Call Centre Workers in India' in Carr, M. *Chains of Fortune: Linking Woman Producers and Workers with Global Markets*, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, 165-180.

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit. Mitter (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Mitter, S. with Ng C. eds. (2005) *Gender and the Digital Economy*, New Delhi: Sage Publications (forthcoming).



# Reminiscences

RANJIT GUPTA

I resigned from ISST's Board of Trustees about a year ago because of difficulties in catching connecting flights from Madurai to New Delhi at odd hours and my hip-bone fracture necessitating the use of a wheel chair to move from one airport to another. Six months later I bid farewell to Madurai, spent a couple of months in Goa, had another brain stroke, took a couple of months to recover and founded a new development action and research organisation with headquarters in a semi-arid block in Tamil Nadu adjoining Karnataka and Andhra. I have been staying here since June and it was here that Manju managed to locate me. She invited me to participate in the 25th anniversary of ISST on 8 October 2005 in New Delhi. I sensed there was a catch, otherwise why would Manju bother to track me down? I wasn't wrong. Because after a while Manju said: "please write a paper for a souvenir ISST is planning to bring out on this occasion". The topic on which I was to write wasn't spelled out. I presumed she wanted a paper recalling and recording my long association with ISST.

"How many pages or words?", I asked. She responded cheerfully: "Oh, as many pages as you wish. The lengthier the better", because only a few of the several old timers she contacted had responded positively to her request to contribute papers to the proposed souvenir. I appreciated her candour, but reserved my prerogative 'to write or not to write'. She wasn't satisfied and repeated her request. I said: "OK, I will. But not before September. It may be as bulky as 10-12 pages". She said, "that will be great, but I need the paper in August, preferably in July itself." I wanted to back out and almost said so when Manju said she has been with ISST virtually from the day it was registered as a trust. I told her, she was better placed than me to write the paper but Manju being Manju did not give up. Instead, she

kept persuading me in her soft but inimitable way to write.

## I

AND here I am doing exactly what Manju knew I would: writing my reminiscences dating back to 1964 when ISST's predecessor, ISS (Institute of Social Studies), was founded under the Societies Registration Act by a few like-minded persons including this writer as member-secretary and Prof. Rajkrishna (Rajbabu or simply Raj to his friends) as chairman. Other founder members of ISS were: Sitaram Goel (Goelsahib to me), Ram Swaroop, Vivek (sorry, I am unable to recall his surname), Dayakrishna (Daya to his friends) and, I am not sure but I think, Girilal Jain (Giri to his friends).

Barring me, the youngest of the lot, others were long-time friends and associates who as Delhi University students or alumni had founded the Changers Club way back in 1946 or 1947 to propagate and push desirable changes in independent India. All of them, barring me again, were eminent personalities in their respective areas of specialization. Ram Swaroop: political thinker and a leading member of the Changers Club. Goelsahib: historian, prolific writer and political commentator. Rajbabu: economist, political economy in particular, and a brilliant speaker. Giri: journalist, well known editor of *The Times of India* and a reputed political commentator. Daya: absent-minded philosopher professor (University of Rajasthan, Jaipur). Vivek: artist, poet and political thinker. All of them were also social or political activists.

Three of us (Rajbabu, Goelsahib and I) worked together at the then Research Department of ICU (Indian Cooperative Union) – operationally headed by its General Secretary, L.C. Jain (Laxmi to his friends). Like me and a few more, Devaki joined the research team a year after I did. We worked together as research associates for a couple years or more when (in 1958 or 1959) Devaki left for England. She returned a few years later and after a while became Mrs Jain.





Sometime in 1964, ICU decided to disband the Research Department, then located at the All India Fine Arts & Crafts (AIFACs) building at Rafi Marg, New Delhi. As General Secretary of ICU, Laxmi offered alternative employment or placement opportunities to the small team of research and administrative staff numbering six or seven. Barring me, the others accepted the offer. Most of them joined the Central Cottage Industries Emporium (CCIE) at Janpath, some joined Super Bazar at Connaught Place.

I decided to be a freelancer and toyed with the idea of reviving somehow the spirit and ethos of Changers Club as I perceived it to be from my repeated interactions with Rajbabu and Goelsahib. The idea clicked. Rajbabu, Goelsahib and others whom I named earlier responded favourably. It did not take much time to formalize the idea by promoting the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) as a registered society. All we needed was a place to locate ISS. Laxmi came to our rescue. The spacious office-cum-library hall we had as ICU's research team at AIFACs building was made available to ISS free of cost along with whatever infrastructure the team possessed: a few office tables, half a dozen chairs, several hundred books and periodicals on various disciplines, and a telephone to boot.

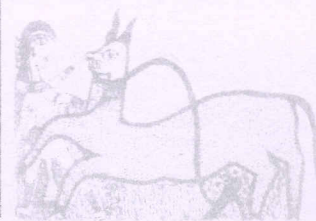
Thus was ISS born. The idea, as conceived by the founder members, was that ISS would be a loose, somewhat informal forum the members of which would meet periodically at AIFACs, discuss and debate (i) current affairs including foreign relations, (ii) changing dynamics of macro and micro economics, (iii) social and political economy, and the like. Whenever possible it would bring out research monographs and working papers, write and publish articles in high-brow as well as popular periodicals, and occasionally organise seminars and workshops.

Initially, for six-seven months, it seemed ISS was evolving on these lines. To sustain the tempo and foster its growth most of the founder members recognized the need to raise financial resources from institutionally acceptable sources. As a freelancer I had no problem in

sustaining myself. Infact I was earning more than what I'd get as a salaried researcher. But as member-secretary of ISS, I accepted the view that I would have to primarily shoulder the responsibility of mobilizing resources to support research and other activities of ISS, induct and engage young researchers, bring out research publications on generally unexplored or poorly explored problems, and so on. On behalf of ISS, Rajbabu and I wrote a few papers and monographs including a memorandum on the Third Five Year Plan which we submitted to the Planning Commission. We participated in a number of seminars organised by other institutions, and also wrote and presented papers. Some of these attracted considerable notice, some remained unnoticed. As this process continued I realized that our concern to promote ISS as "a loose, somewhat informal forum" was increasingly giving way to the growth of a formal research body. Somewhere along this course Rajbabu left for USA. Barring me, other founder members also seemed to have lost interest in sustaining ISS. I, too, would have given up ISS but for the fact that on its behalf I had submitted a research proposal to the Research & Planning Committee (RPC) of the Planning Commission. The proposal envisaged a study of two small towns, one in the then Union Territory of Delhi, the other in Haryana. The two shared several characteristics in common. But, while the one in Haryana was growing fast as a growth centre, the one in Delhi showed no such signs. The focus of the study was on identifying the forces and factors that propelled the Haryana town to become a growth centre, and stagnated if not suffocated the other.

The proposal envisaged a grant of Rs 50,000 to conduct and complete the study in two years. I wasn't sure whether RPC would sanction the project. And, if it did, whether it would sanction a grant as high as Rs 50,000. In 1968, that is 37 years ago, Rs 50,000 was, perhaps, as big a sum as Rs 1 million today. I was, therefore, surprised and elated when RPC sanctioned the proposal and extended 50 per cent of the grant or Rs 25,000

*To sustain the tempo and foster its growth most of the founder members recognized the need to raise financial resources from institutionally acceptable sources.*





*The research team worked spiritedly and maintained a high standard with focus on quality.*

in advance to cover the first year's cost. The balance was released in two installments: 25 per cent after a year and the remaining 25 per cent on the completion of the project and submission of the project report.

To conduct the study a project director, two research associates, four field investigators and a typist were appointed for two years (1968-1970). During the first 18 months the study progressed satisfactorily. The research team worked spiritedly and maintained a high standard with focus on quality. Six months before the study was due to be completed the research staff, including the project director, began to worry about their future. Will ISS manage to get another grant? Will they be retained? If not, where would they go?

These and similar questions affected their morale which in turn impeded the progress and quality of their work. I realized I have either to find alternative employment for them or spend nearly all my time and energy to raise resources to retain them and their enthusiasm as a research team. After some searching introspection I decided to explore and find alternative employment for them rather than change my life style and orientation from a free-wheeling researcher and writer to resource mobilizer and administrator. Fortunately, I succeeded in motivating them to complete the study and submitting the report on time by ensuring employment to each of them in other organisations.

Having done so I decided to withdraw from ISS by handing over the charge to one of the founder members – who ever was willing and available. Otherwise, I would hand it over to someone well acquainted with the founder members and motivated to sustain and develop ISS. If neither of these possibilities materialized, I would leave ISS and let it survive as a dormant or inactive body.

In 1971 I moved out of AIFACs building and three years later left Delhi and joined the Indian Institute of Management at Ahmedabad. Thus ended a chapter that had a promising though amateurish start.

## II

But, after hibernating for 14 long years, ISS suddenly resurfaced with a suffix 'T' to denote that, as a legal entity, it was now a trust, not a society. The credit for this resurrection goes to Devaki who volunteered, equally suddenly, to single-handedly shoulder the responsibility. I met her in Delhi sometime towards the close of 1983 and handed over whatever papers and records of ISS I had with me. As ISS had no tangible assets nor liability to transfer, Devaki's task was both tough (no assets or resources to start with) and uncomplicated (no liabilities either). I do not know what she did to resurrect ISS as ISST except that it was registered in 1980 with Ram Swaroop, Goelsahib, Rajbabu and Gopiji as trustees and Devaki as its director. Thereafter till 1988, I had no contact with ISST. I do not know how it survived or what it did from 1980 to 1988, though as chairman of IIM-A's Centre for Management in Agriculture (CMA) I did visit Delhi several times during this period but frankly made no attempts to get in touch with ISST or Devaki. This does not mean I was totally cut-off from ISST. Thanks to some of my old time ICU colleagues I knew that ISST was housed in one part of the Kamla Devi Bhavan at Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg and that it was doing not too badly.

I am not sure, but I think it was towards the close of 1988 that I was pleasantly surprised to get a long distance call from Devaki. As is her wont she talked sweetly and politely for sometime, then suddenly upped the gear and accused me of taking no interest in ISST when it was I who passed on the buck to her. Before I could say "stop hedging, spill the beans" she invited me to attend the forthcoming meeting of ISST's Board of Trustees in Bangalore. "Why drag me when by all accounts you seem to be doing well" I said. But she insisted and I yielded, partly because I was curious, and partly because the invitation offered a cost-free journey to Bangalore to spend a few days with my nephew and niece-in-law and the kids.

When I met the Board, Devaki introduced me to the ISST trustees present in the meeting:





Dr Shanti Ghosh, chairperson, Ms Radha Bhatt, Mrs Leela Chandrasekhar, and Gopiji. I knew Gopiji from the ICU days, had met Dr Ghosh once or twice in Delhi, but was not well acquainted with her, though I was well acquainted with her husband, Mr Sudhir Ghosh – the author of *Gandhi's Emissary*, the emissary being he himself. In the post-independence era he was also well-known for his pioneering work in building the Faridabad township adjoining Delhi. Back in 1946-47 when, in the aftermath of partition and the mayhem and bloodbath that followed, millions of refugees from West Pakistan poured in and paralyzed the country, Delhi in particular, Nehru entrusted the task of resettling thousands of them in Faridabad primarily to Sudhir Ghosh. He took up the challenge and along with a dedicated band of young volunteers – Laxmi being one of them – handled the herculean task admirably well. When I joined ICU in 1956 he had a charming bungalow in Kalupur, then a village situated half-way between Safdarjung Hospital and Kutub Minar. The bungalow named Sunanda housed the Research Department of ICU. That is where I met the famous Sudhir Ghosh.

Some 12 years later, when I was member-secretary of ISS, I had an opportunity of working closely with him. He was then heading a massive famine-relief project involving renovation of a large number of derelict tanks in Purulia, a chronically drought-prone district in Bengal. Several hundred tanks of varying sizes across the length and breadth of Purulia had been renovated under his direction. As far as I know, it was the first food-for-work project in colonial as well as post-colonial India. Interestingly, the wheat aid to implement the project flowed from the infamous US PL 480 aid that shook the political economy during the 1960s and early 1970s, and at the same time aided the interventions that led to Green Revolution 30-40 years ago.

The Purulia project was by and large completed when Mr Ghosh invited me to study and evaluate the project. He had a double storey, modestly furnished house across the circuit

house (government dak bungalow) in Purulia town. I stayed in this house intermittently – whenever I went to Purulia to conduct the study. Incidentally, the study of Purulia Tank Rehabilitation Project was the first full-fledged study of ISS. It wasn't published but I presented the findings of the study, along with the findings of a few more studies that I conducted, in *Economic & Political Weekly*. The article received critical appreciation from several well-known economists and policy makers like Prof. M L Dantwala, Prof. Sukhomoy Chokrovarty, and Dr B S Minhas.

Without digressing any further let me come back to ISST. The meeting of its Board of Trustees that I attended as a special invitee back in 1988 was held in the Bangalore office of ISST, then housed in a cute though dilapidated building in a posh locality. It was a barrack-type single storeyed structure containing a row of small and large rooms. What added charm and gloss to the building was its sylvian environment and a 7-8 feet high boundary wall that sheltered the sprawling, undulating campus in which it stood.

The meeting lasted for a couple of hours. I wasn't clear what was going on except that the trustees were discussing some issues of critical importance to ISST. As the discussion proceeded the soft and polite voices lost some shine and became more audible. I realized that the topic under discussion was a large research project that ISST was about to launch and the research and administrative arrangements that needed to be made: for example, who would direct it, who else ought to be involved, what should be the administrative system, and so on. The research areas of concern to the project, if I recollect correctly, were women's work and child health and development. The project called for application of both medical and social sciences by a multi-disciplinary team, library based research as well as empirical investigation.

As I wondered why I was invited to attend the meeting, the discussion moved to a new point: the implication of a trustee directing or conducting the study and receiving in turn the

*The meeting of its Board of Trustees that I attended as a special invitee back in 1988 was held in the Bangalore office of ISST, then housed in a cute though dilapidated building in a posh locality.*





*I took over the charge from Dr Ghosh and handled the functions of ISST chairman for 8-9 long years. At the end of this period I stepped down from the chairman's post, remained a trustee for a few more years and eventually resigned on the grounds earlier stated.*

remuneration budgeted for this role. No one doubted that the person eminently capable of assuming and handling this role, especially from ISST's point of view, was none else than Dr Shanti Ghosh. It seemed that the latter was also not opposed to the idea; hence, it was agreed, that the issue that needed to be settled was the ethical and legal dimensions of reimbursing Dr Ghosh the remuneration budgeted for the role. Eventually Dr Ghosh herself resolved the problem. She volunteered to withdraw from ISST's Board of Trustees, draw the stipulated remuneration and take charge of the study. What happened next confounded me. Someone raised the issue, who would be the trustee-chairperson of ISST in place of Dr Ghosh, and as an afterthought proposed my name. Before I could realize the import of this dramatic intervention, another trustee seconded the nomination, no one objected, and before I could say "what the dickens" I became the second trustee chairperson of ISST.

Thus I took over the charge from Dr Ghosh and handled the functions of ISST chairman for 8-9 long years. At the end of this period I stepped down from the chairman's post, remained a trustee for a few more years and eventually resigned on the grounds earlier stated.

### III

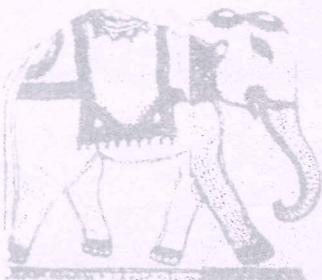
I took up the chairman's position primarily with a view to lend a helping hand to Devaki to build ISST, hopefully, as a centre of excellence. ISST then was a small outfit. Barring Mr A N Kaul, a competent chartered accountant who helped ISST in maintaining and managing its accounts, virtually all the Delhi-based ISST staff including the director (Devaki) were women. Most of them were 25-30 years old; hence inexperienced but keen to learn and relate the learning to improve their problem-solving skills. The case with ISST's Bangalore unit was somewhat similar where barring Madhav, a young, energetic research associate, and G R N Moorthy, an elderly multi-purpose functionary, other members of staff were women, inexperienced but keen learners.

The women dominated domain of ISST was and still is one of its distinctive features. Another feature that drew my attention as I learned more about ISST was, that in terms of conceptual and organisational design it had made a complete departure from its predecessor, ISS. Whereas ISS was a "loose, somewhat informal forum" of intellectuals bound only by a sense of mutuality and shared understanding, neither requiring the creation of an established organisational setup, ISST seemed to be oblivious of the organisational implications of its conceptual design. Conceptually it was (as it is even now) almost exclusively focused on gender issues. The means or methods it followed to realize or express this focus were (and perhaps still are) gender related research, family counselling, publicity and publications. But, as in most NGOs, these were (and perhaps still are) held together not organically nor organisationally but by concentration of power at the top and personalized style of functioning.

There are other glaring differences between ISS and ISST. ISS wasn't envisaged to be a durable entity. It was, as if by design, destined to fade away silently, as it did in fact. ISST doesn't share this *nirvanic weltanschauung*. It shares a different world view: empowerment of women by women through research, publications and publicity, counselling and conferencing. And it means to survive, strike strong roots, and keep going. This determination or will to survive is reflected by the fact that ISST is celebrating today its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, *inter alia*, by publishing this Souvenir.

But the 25-year long march has not always been a journey without hiccups or roadblocks. Extraneous factors or circumstances created some of these roadblocks.

The credit for resolving these problems and ensuring ISST's ascend goes largely to Devaki, ISST's founder director, Swapna who took over from her, and the trustees who facilitated the process. One of the first decisions the Board of Trustees took when I joined it was to identify and induct at least two more trustees. Happily, it didn't





take us much time to realize this end. Dr A V Vaidyanathan, an eminent economist, and Mr N Krishnan, an equally eminent diplomat belonging to the Indian Foreign Service cadre, accepted our invitation and joined the Board as trustees. In 1997 when I decided to step down from the position I held as Board's chairman, Vaidyanathan agree to be the next chairman.

#### IV

It is curious how in the process of building a fledgling organisation the success of the very measure designed to facilitate the process brings about a change in the organisation's work structure, management culture and orientation. Ostensibly there is some truth in the assertion that some management specialists make: that strategy defines an organisation's structure. To an extent ISST validates this assertion. Thus its need to mobilize significantly large financial support to ensure its stability and growth and the organisational change that followed because of its ability to mobilize the desired support. When I joined the ISST Board Devaki had more or less succeeded in persuading the Ford Foundation to extend a substantial grant to ISST. Efforts to mobilize the support were initiated as far back as 1984. I am not sure but it seems that on the advice of Ford Foundation two separate committees were constituted successively to carry out two institutional reviews of ISST. The institutional reviews were conducted by external consultants. The first by a four-member committee consisting of Prof. V A Pai Panandikar, P G Misra, Arun Sood, and V Krishnan. The second review in 1994 was conducted by a two-member team: Ms CP Sujaya, joint secretary incharge of H R D Ministry's Department of Women & Child Development, and Ms Vimla Ramachandran, national coordinator of Mahila Samakhya.

The second review team appreciated ISST's efforts over time to develop it as a gender-focused research unit. The team also made a few recommendations the thrusts of which, if I recollect correctly, was the need to professionalise ISST's administration and financial management

and re-organise its research and academic activities to enhance their value. Implicit in the recommendations was also the notion that the emerging potential of the changing scenario in gender research could be perhaps better tapped through appropriate organisational change.

The ISST Board considered the report and recommendations of the review team carefully and accepted with suitable adaptations those that were critical to fostering the growth of ISST and strengthening its management. Around this time Devaki, who was planning to join her husband in South Africa, expressed her desire to step down from the post of ISST director. To facilitate the process she actively assisted the Board's Search Committee consisting of three trustees to identify and induct a suitable replacement. Thanks to her, several names were generated. The Committee succeeded in inducting and appointing the right person: Swapna Mukhopadhyay. Again, it was Devaki who had identified and suggested her name.

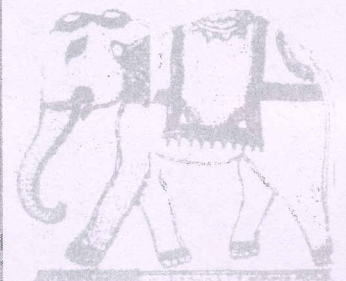
Around this time (1993-94) steps were also taken by the Board to plan, organise and manage the affairs of ISST systematically. Two committees comprising 4-5 trustees were constituted, one to guide and facilitate **academic planning** and the other to systematize and facilitate management of **finance and administration**.

Swapna took her time to acclimatize herself with the new surrounding, establish rapport with the research and administrative staff, and took charge of the projects underway or in the pipeline.

The changes that followed in quick succession after Swapna took over as director did create, in my view, creative tension in the organisation in the initial months. Six-seven months later Devaki returned from South Africa and spent some time at ISST – a domain she had built literally single-handedly with utmost care and affection for an unbroken stretch of 12 years or more.

As the internal environment regained buoyancy, ISST's activity portfolio increased to include a number of research projects, some

*It is curious how in the process of building a fledgling organisation the success of the very measure designed to facilitate the process brings about a change in the organisation's work structure, management culture and orientation.*





rather large in terms of reach and funding support. As this trend continued and ISST grew in size and stature I decided to step down from the position I occupied for 8-9 years as the second chairman of ISST's Board of Trustees. The Board accepted my plea and chose Dr AVVaidyanathan to head the Board as its third chairman. Simultaneously the process of including 3-4 new trustees was initiated with emphasis on inducting younger and energetic ladies actively involved in gender issues through a variety of ways: research, education, social action, journalism and advocacy. Once we succeeded in identifying and inducting such persons as trustees, it was time for me to bid adieu to ISST.

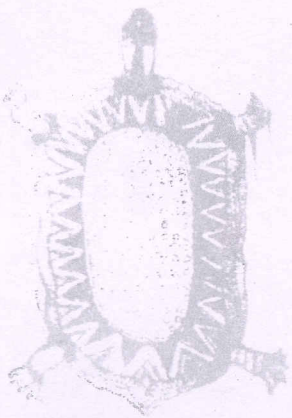
## V

Let me conclude this rambling piece by recording my appreciation and thanks to: Devaki, Manju, Swapna, Ratna, Pushpa, Sudha, Madhav, Jolly, Raj Viridi, Rina, G R N Moorthy, Sultan, Shashi, Sudha, Grace, Ramani Amarnath Kaul, Krishna, Revathi, Pallavi, Sharda, Veenu Rajeev, Seema, Jabber, Mukta, Hemalatha, Gowri Vaidyanathan, Krishnan, Radha, Leela, Gopiji And others who participated in the making of ISST.

WELL DONE ALL OF YOU

WELL DONE ISST ■

*Prof. Ranjit Gupta is a retired professor and chairman, Centre for Management in Agriculture, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. He remained chairperson of the Board of Trustees of ISST from 1988-1997.*





Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) is a product of the times. Started in the bedroom of our flat in Jorbagh in 1975-76, using a dead file which gave the original registration papers of an organisation called ISS which had been set up in 1965, it carried itself forward on the momentum provided by the many energies and events leading to and followed by 1975, the International Women's Year.

Looking back, it seems that the shape it took, the initiatives it launched and its particular character at the end of 20 years—1975 to 1995 just happened, brick by brick, without any architectural plan, without any initial financial back-up and without even a suggestion of what it was all about and what it was going to unleash. While initially it looked as if it was taking one step at a time, an approach that certainly one man, namely Gandhiji, would have approved, this gave way to many steps in many directions simultaneously most of the time. In one sense it could be said that ISST burst open on the scene, with all the good and bad aspects of bursting.

One of the points that ISST proves, among others, is that it is possible to go from nowhere to somewhere, if the ears and the mind are constantly on the alert for signals from the ground and the feet have no hesitation or encumbrance to follow that signal to its source. It responded to issues and needs that emerged from the public domain, be it from the state, academy or the women's movement. This pulsation attracted support of all kinds needed for making the bricks into a house. And indeed a house it became as by 1992, ISST owned its own office space in two cities—Delhi and Bangalore—which in turn housed activities ranging from family counselling to a marketing facility centre for women producers and a select library service, apart from the research and administrative teams.

Over the same period, more than 40 young women, some fresh from university, some young fellows of other mainstream research centres,

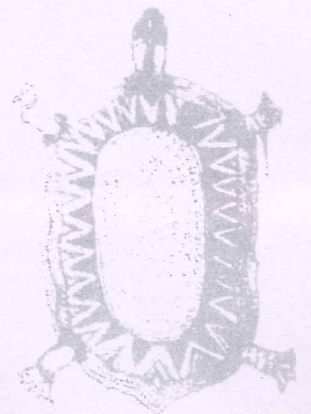
# Building a Service Station Brick by Brick

DEVAKI JAIN

and some wives of civil servants and activists, passed through the Trust's portals, as researchers. A few stayed on to become well-known gender specialists. Many organisations and networks were born or facilitated by this house. Over the same period, the house prepared more than 100 reports, six books, several project proposals for NGOs, and many policy and programme advice notes.

ISST's history suggests that the women's movement as well as developmental government agencies, require and support a service station which can provide researched, data-based reports and reference material, and follow-up on crises and tackle problems after studying these reports. A kind of technical support group, as it is called nowadays. It also proves that government constantly uses and can use policy and programme advice, evaluation and project design advice from outside, but does not see the importance of supporting such technical services with capacity-building finance. What follows is an attempt to move from ISST's genesis, to a description of the various roles which the organisation tried to play as a service station, some of the features of its governance and finance, the synergy that this produced as well as the strains, its tentative attempts at practising what it perceived as the feminist method, the research methodology and some of the innovative management ideas that evolved out of that experience. We will dwell on how the inside is affected by the outside, on leadership and transition, and ponder over what all this suggests for the future.

*One of the points that ISST proves, among others, is that it is possible to go from nowhere to somewhere, if the ears and the mind are constantly on the alert for signals from the ground and the feet have no hesitation or encumbrance to follow that signal to its source.*





*This exposure plunged me into concern for the inequality between men and women and made me aware of the huge deficiencies in knowledge about that inequality.*

### The political and the personal

While the need for an institutional vehicle for doing research is what made me in 1976, pull out the file, the idea and thrust of the research was born out of two 'feminist' calls.

First was the experience of compiling and editing a volume for 3 years during 1971-74, called *Indian Women*, for the Publications Division of the Government of India. The invitation to compile this book had its genesis in a 'feminist take-off'. I had written an article in a special issue of *Seminar* devoted to the theme of 'Indian Woman'. In this article, I had argued the need to replace the reigning goddesses who provided role models in the Tamil Brahmin tradition into which I was born—namely: the images of Ahalya, Sita, Draupadi, Tara and Mandodari, called the *panchakanyas*—by other role models, namely, Ambapali, Gargi and Avvaiyar. Looking back, I would say that this piece is the first stirring of feminist consciousness in me. I was perhaps unknowingly freeing myself from the Ahalyas and Sitas.

This exposure plunged me into concern for the inequality between men and women and made me aware of the huge deficiencies in knowledge about that inequality. The introduction to that volume, the first piece in that book, is the beginning of my travels into understanding the dynamics of gender. In short, it caused my rebirth.

The book was released in January 1975, even as Vina Mazumdar, Lotika Sarkar and Kumud Sharma were trying to complete the CSWI report—from an office in ICSSR—and we had many discussions, especially with Kumud Sharma who was drafting the chapter on economics. These visits to ICSSR brought me in touch with the inimitable J. P. Naik, changing the course of my life and giving a new lease of life to ISST, as the ICSSR funded the first piece of research that I undertook.

The second call was the first UN World Conference on Women held in Mexico in 1975. This conference was a turning point, an overwhelming experience for anyone who

attended it, in its sheer physical size and 'aura'. Nearly 8,000 women gathered in one place and challenged every proposition that determined history, economics, politics and development. In some sense, it was a larger, less divided (official versus NGO), more political (as different from technical) space, than those that followed. At a panel chaired by the famous Ester Boserup on women outside the GNP, I presented a paper on 'measurement failure' in the counting of women workers and the analysis of their roles in the economy—drawn from our Indian time-use study.

### Research for advocacy

The entry point was a time-allocation study of men and women in rural households in six villages, conducted during 1975-77, and supported by the ICSSR. The hypothesis of this study was that female work participation rates are underestimated in India due to methodological incorrectness or what can be called measurement failure. This study in a sense, was a pioneering study for many reasons. While the first field trial was conducted by Prof. Ashok Rudra, then at Shantiniketan, in a village called Muluk, and established that women and girls were earning their daily bread by subterfuge and were certainly uncounted, the study also had the partnership of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). Investigators, all the way up to the Chairman and the Chief Executive Officer, were totally absorbed in both the implementation and the outcome of the study.

The study revealed that amongst the poor, the work participation rate of women was greater than that of men and that children, especially girl children, between the age of eight and twelve were engaged in significant economic activity. It also showed that the activity code, namely 'domestic activity code', as canvassed in the opening block of the NSSO schedule was a stumbling block for women due to their self-perception that the activity in which they were engaged most regularly over the year was household work (even if they worked for four





hours a day weeding, or for six hours a day looking after animals and milking, or for twelve hours a day chopping mulberry and feeding it to the silkworms). The study not only pointed out the invisibility of women workers, but also made inroads into how to change the methodology of the survey in order to make visible what was invisible.

The study's conclusion that amongst the poorest, defined as the landless households, women's work participation rates were higher than that of men, led us to understand that 'all poor women are women workers', since no poor woman cannot work, as she and her family would perish. Women provided the survival kit to the household and would do anything, including selling their bodies, to find that daily bread.

ISST teams led by our first and most worthy research assistant Malini Chand (now Sheth) lived in the villages for a year and recorded what poor people—women, men and children actually did.<sup>2</sup> The information was shocking. Women and girls were working 18 hours out of 24. Boys played or went to school while girls cooked, cleaned, and carried. Girls were often breadwinners for the whole household amongst the poor. Women's work often increased as a result of a 'development' intervention without any increase in either income or convenience. Men preferred to be idle rather than work for poor wages. Intriguing data like the low female participation rate in West Bengal, was uncovered. Poor women and girls in West Bengal were working too but 'under cover' in 'feminine' work—such as domestic help, even begging—often for non-monetary rewards.

The hypothesis underlying the time-use study, challenging the measurement of women's economic contribution, and concentrating on the poorest, attracted the interest of many of the most well-known economists and social scientists of that time. Apart from Prof Ashok Rudra, Professors Pranab Bardhan, Pradhan Prasad and Ashok Mitra gave suggestions on how to stratify the sample by class; Prof V. M. Dandekar directed the NSSO to partner with us, both in selection of villages and households and later to give us the

questionnaire of the 32nd Round to canvass with the same households that the NSSO visited for this Round, and also access to the raw schedules of the NSSO itself.

Thus, we were not only able to present our data in columns alongside NSSO data for the 27th and 32nd rounds (though not at all strictly comparable) but also in columns alongside tabulated NSSO 32nd round questionnaires—making our case on under-enumeration as well as the reason for it, stronger.

ISST drew extraordinary mileage from this one study as the study got known by a constituency of persons known for their expertise in data collection and use, especially on employment, both outside and inside the official system. We were included in all the NSSO, CSO and Census conferences and began systematically to establish ourselves as the focal point, both in redesigning data collection and in action related to women and work concerns.

The Invitation to give the Padmaja Naidu Memorial Lecture<sup>3</sup> in 1982 gave us a chance to wave these facts from the rooftops so to speak and to challenge social scientists. What was this sociological family they were talking about? What were all these kinship organisations in India and their rules and regulations? These were fragmented non-families in which women battled for life. What was this counting of workers and hierarchy of work that the statisticians were putting forth? Women among the asset-less households had higher work participation rates than men from the same households.

This differentiation between men and women, amongst the poor, now known as gender differentiation, became the basis of all the research and advocacy of ISST. The uncovering of women within the poverty sets as a 'class' by themselves was of crucial importance to the journey, as it challenged political ideology as well as economic programmes.<sup>4</sup>

The second entry point was to look for situations in which women were the predominant workers and their engagement in that work had

*This differentiation between men and women, amongst the poor, now known as gender differentiation, became the basis of all the research and advocacy of ISST.*





been recognised and organised in order to improve their economic and social strength. This search was initiated because of news of SEWA as an organisation of self-employed workers in the informal sector, but whose unionisation had transformed their negotiating power. At that time, SEWA was the women's wing of the Textile Labour Association, a trade union with a strong presence in Ahmedabad. An ICSSR funded case study of SEWA led to a search for similar organisational experiences of large masses of women. A survey of India, looking for such successful endeavours led to the book *Women's Quest for Power*.<sup>5</sup>

The book and its design opened up a new style of writing case studies taking a ground level experience, bringing in a primary data profile with an on-the-spot household survey, followed by the narrative voices of women. It also established another proposition, namely that poor women were able to identify spaces where they could eke out a livelihood even if only at a survival level but, providing backward and forward linkages to them, such as organisation, market intelligence and access to raw materials or wholesale goods through collective purchase, could enhance their income by many times. This amounted to a critique and a revision of the mode of developing income-generating projects for women, a pattern that was at that time the norm and also supported by the government and even agencies like CSWD, UNICEF or DWCRA. Our suggestion was that the survival strategies of poor women can teach development design.

Thus began the search for clusters of women who were already in a particular occupation. Our effort was to expand that space. This in turn led to a Government of India national programme called STEP (Support Team for Employment Promotion). The experience also led to the birth of Mahila Haat, a marketing window for women producers at ISST. The idea was to start with the traditional haats as viable marketplaces where the trade turnover would be greater than that of modern markets, and where women could sell what they produced. Moreover the idea of what to produce came directly from the market place.

The fact that ISST's first study was partnered with mainstream statistical agencies including the Planning Commission, enabled ISST to have a Round Table in 1980, with 50 to 60 senior economists (some of whom were initially skeptical). This was called 'statistical dialogue between micro and macro' at the Institute of Economic Growth, University of Delhi. Micro studies from different agencies were presented to the official data system which in turn led to the inclusion of a gender focus, both in the CSO, the NSSO and the National Board of Statistics as well as the Registrar General. This partnership with the official data collection systems continued and ISST was part of the delegation from India for the first International Conference on Household Survey convened by ESCAP in Bangkok. We carried the day, arguing that women as a subject should not only feature, as it usually did, in the category of social welfare but in their economic and social roles. It was also the beginning of the recognition that the household cannot be the ultimate unit of sampling as individuals within households not only held different occupations but often experienced development differently. These micro-macro interactions on data encouraged us to initiate a network of economists men and women who were involved in gendered research, called EIWIG (Economists Interested in Women's Issues Group), a clumsy title but intended to be inclusive of men.

Many studies revolving around poor women's work—in different industries and sectors such as forest-based industry, marine products, in handloom industry, khadi and village industry, sericulture (both mulberry and tassar), and public works programmes—all requiring field-work with household surveys, where households were stratified according to class as revealed by landlessness modules, became the core of our work. We did the most elaborate study to understand female-headedness in households, choosing the areas for field study to reflect different 'sources' or 'causes' of female-headedness.<sup>6</sup> Most of these were commissioned by the government or the UN agencies.





We had such a collection of studies, as well as knowledge of the various data sources that we decided to provide a service station for information on women and work, and published a three-volume bibliography on women and work in India, published by Sage Publications. This was to be updated every year, and we produced a second, and later a selective third. Around this time, we also published the first catalogue of women studies centres in India. These bibliographies and catalogues were in continuous demand by all agencies as it was the time when there was a quest to find the organisational base for engendering both development and databases.

In those days (1975-85), the environment was such that these ideas and findings were taken seriously by the 'mainstream'. Women were identified as a subset of the poor, for statistical and programmatic responses. Their occupational characteristics, often a man and woman having different sources of income within a poor family, was taken note of by the Planning Commission and Rural Development Departments. The sixth Five-Year Plan of the Government of India (1976-81), for the first time, had a separate section on women's employment, with tables showing the sectors where women were bunched and their responses to this phenomena. For example, women were often in the least paid and the most tedious occupations, apart from the fact that the many tasks they performed in the process of manufacture, which were also income earning, were not even notified as occupations. Therefore, neither was it counted nor was there a wage fixation. The government's response was to set up many structures from statistics improvement to labour laws to the promotion of the organisation of women workers around their occupation. They also reserved 25 per cent of the IRDP loans for female-headed households, amongst the poor, in some states. ISST then argued that public works programmes were a basic amenity for poor women and that the women's movement needs to recognise that broad-based employment

programmes were a more important project for poor women than the micro-income generating projects which were the fashion of the day. This led to ISST's advocacy for the 'right to work' as a national programme and the calling of a national conference on the 'right to work' in collaboration with the Institute of Applied Manpower Research and SEWA and with support from the Planning Commission, in 1991.

Responding to the notion of integrating women into development, as well as a message from the UN's 1975 World Conference on Women (Mexico) and the concern for women in poverty, ISST undertook a study of the planning process of the Government of Karnataka, calling it 'Integrating women into a state five-year plan'. Today this would be called an attempt at mainstreaming. The government funded this study and there began a continuing partnership with the Government of Karnataka.

This study raised the whole question not only of development transfers to the poor but also on the context within which poor women could be enabled out of their poverty. Development design and development transfer was flawed—the removal of women's poverty had to be located in a broader critique of the system, the method and the local, macroeconomic, political and social contexts.

Simultaneously, we were critiquing the sericulture development project of the World Bank and did a 'tasks' format showing what women did in sericulture, removing the myth that they could only make garlands with the broken cocoons. Women were awake all night feeding the greedy silk worms whose trays occupied all the huts, cleaning their dirt and cutting leaves from the mulberry bushes. Men hardly did any work except selling the cocoons! As a result the Government of Karnataka set up a Task Force on Women in Sericulture which later informed the World Bank. The gender dimension of these projects became a part of the process. One woman from Kanakapura was to become the sole trader in the cocoon market. This led to a number of such studies where we exposed the

*In those days (1975-85), the environment was such that these ideas and findings were taken seriously by the 'mainstream'.*

*Women were identified as a subset of the poor, for statistical and programmatic responses.*





myths as well as showed what interventions could overcome the exclusion of women from the pre-project profile.

### ISST as networker

Along the way, in the same period, ISST enabled the birth of many new organisations. It was at ISST that Kali for Women drafted its first proposal for support. Ritu Menon had been editing our *Women's Quest for Power*. When she and Urvashi Butalia decided to start their own publishing house, ISST personnel provided the knowhow for registering the society, drafting a proposal for the publication of *Speaking of Faith*, Kali for Women's first publication, funded by NORAD. ISST also enabled the birth of many more SEWAs, such as SEWA (Delhi) and SEWA (Lucknow), and identified agencies through the Gandhian Women's Network, which then went on to become SEWAs, such as SEWA (Bhagalpur). From this emerged SEWA Bharat, a network of SEWAs. We even tried with the Dastkar Anjuman, a co-operative society that Gandhiji had established, to develop a SEWA in Kashmir to enable women in the carpet industry.

ISST also laid the foundation for other networks. The Gandhian Women's Network, now dormant, was initiated with a meeting of about 30 women drawn from Gandhian ashrams all over India. The study of SEWA, whose ethic was strongly Gandhian and revolutionary, the close association with Lakshmi Ashram in Kausani, whose head, Radha Bhatt was a Trustee, and who helped us to understand Gandhian practice and pedagogy, roused our curiosity. Could there be a Gandhian feminism? With impulses and ideological premises different from, say, Marxist feminism? The best way, we thought, of finding out was to ask women in the Gandhian ashrams. We encouraged each woman to narrate her own story and locate what in it was the touch of Gandhi and what in it was irksome to her as a woman. It was a first for the women, and the network continued to meet, seeking to delineate its own perspective on women and economy.

The EIWIG convened three more seminars, such as on 'Women and industry' by U. Kalpagam

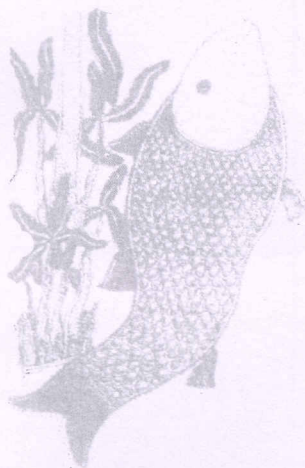
at the Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS), 'Women in poverty by Nirmala Banerjee at CSSS in Calcutta and one by Pravin Visaria from GIAP in Ahmedabad. ISST was the energiser and helped in raising funds from the Ministry of Labour and the Planning Commission, depending on the theme for these seminars. The four seminars of EIWIG yielded another ISST Volume, *Tyranny of the Household*, drawing attention to all aspects of women and work.

### A service station for networks

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), a network of third world women engaged in development concerns, was launched at a meeting in August 1984, called by ISST, at Tharangavana in Bangalore, where ISST and the Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation had their offices. The idea of holding a brainstorming session for women from the south came out of many experiences and initiatives ranging from a study ISST had done of integrating women into five-year plans. I was invited to give a lecture at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) at Paris called 'Development as if women mattered or can women build a new paradigm?'<sup>8</sup> The bonding of women economists, enabled by EIWIG, the conversations and experiences of women from the developing countries and most of all the advent of the third UN world conference on women, planned for June 1985 in Nairobi contributed to the launching of DAWN.

It also seemed a natural consequence of all the work of ISST, as described in a report prepared by C. P. Sujaya and Vimala Ramachandran (called 'Strategic Planning' for a Ford Foundation review of ISST). To quote,

ISST has been a pioneer in critiquing existing development models and paradigms from the women's perspective. The development theories and approaches taken up from time to time (social welfare vs. development, 'women only' projects, 'mainstreaming' women in development etc.) have been the subject of analysis in





ISST's research. Many lines of argument, sometimes overlapping, sometimes converging, have been followed. Thus, 'politics of development' has become an important dimension of ISST research. It seeks to provide an ideological base for ISST's work through a vision of alternative growth patterns 'appropriate' for women in poor households. One argument that ISST has been able to float convincingly is that—when conventional 'development' has had such a devastating effect on the livelihoods of poor marginalised women, the concept of bringing them into the 'mainstream' does not make a lot of sense. In the mining study, for example, an ecology-friendly approach has been favoured even at the cost of foregoing new employment opportunities in the villages created by the mining operation. ISST's interest, in this case, is in sustainable development. At the same time, ISST's basic efforts have been to give poor women a voice in local governance and decision-making, so that services and programmes are better delivered and answer women's specific needs and questions. The major contribution of ISST to creating an alternative paradigm for women's development has been the DAWN network.

Women from the developing countries in international conferences, and in other North-led forums during 1975-84 experienced moments of distance and discomfort. There was an inevitable bunching together and the almost tedious reference to 'third world women'. Agendas as well as knowledge bases came from the Northern women. When asked if I had any ideas for Nairobi, I suggested a consultation, in a place in the South, far away from New York, where we could put our act together, before going to a world conference.

In three unforgettable days in Bangalore, 20-24 August 1984, the group, comprising of one woman each from Africa, West Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific, South Asia,

as well as one from Europe and the USA as donors, each person a friend whom I had known from my overseas meetings in the 1970s and early 1980s and several from India, transformed the framework given by the UN for Nairobi, and as we often recalled later, transformed each individual.

For about two years ISST was a service station for DAWN-taking care of finances and communication, and drawing in other networks and agencies. We held meetings in Delhi to share the project. ISST became a hub for Nairobi and supported nearly 40 women from grass-roots and academia to attend the Nairobi conference, including some now famous names like Bina Aggarwal, Srilata Batlivala, Ritu Menon and Urvashi Butalia of Kali for Women, and Kumud Sharma. ISST was also drafting two chapters for the official GoI report for Nairobi.

At Nairobi, DAWN presented a book, the now famous *Development Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspective* by Gita Sen and Karen Grown, as well as several panels, and emerged as the most significant new actor in the international fora.<sup>9</sup> Upon return, ISST initiated a process in India—it organised the translation of the DAWN book summary into eight Indian languages, had workshops with grass-root organisations to spread the analysis, tried to establish a DAWN India movement to politicise the Indian women's movement around development, and initiated a new framework, a new paradigm. The international focal point for DAWN, was moved to Latin America, from where it moved to the Caribbean and now is in Fiji, in a process that was part of the DAWN ethic that it should not become a power structure around any individual or organisation, but share the power and advantages of location by shifting to different regions every three or five years.

Once again another asset of ISST, its international linkages, the reputation with donors due to its research, and the ethic of facilitating made it possible for us to undertake anything as

*One argument that ISST has been able to float convincingly is that—when conventional 'development' has had such a devastating effect on the livelihoods of poor marginalised women, the concept of bringing them into the 'mainstream' does not make a lot of sense.*





*Our knowledge base on grass-roots organisations whose special focus or participation was with women became our special asset.*

ambitious as launching an international development network. Alongside DAWN, ISST began to provide material to the South Commission, a commission of economists chaired by the late Julius Nyerere, of which I was a member. In collaboration with the South Commission and DAWN, ISST organised a consultation on African Debt at Ibadan University. ISST was slowly growing into a service station for the South.

### **Aspects of research methodology: A balancing act**

Our beginnings—women and work in statistics, women workers in organisation, women in poverty, women within the household, and women in struggle, determined the course of our journey. Since our work involved identifying large organisations which were economically active, and since our thesis was that that it was remunerated work which was the first need of poor women, we were engaged to identify five projects in which large numbers of poor women were involved and whose work could be furthered. We decided to do an all-India scan, using the help of our already-in-place partners such as SEWA for Gujarat and the west, Lakshmi Ashram in Almora for Uttar Pradesh and the North, Santiniketan for West Bengal and the east and our own branch in Bangalore for south. From these five projects, proposals were developed in a design workshop with the organisations that were funded. This exercise developed our skills in designing fundable projects for small NGOs, enabling us to provide a kind of technical service for lesser known organisations. We thus became a service station for the grass-roots.

Our knowledge base on grass-roots organisations whose special focus or participation was with women became our special asset. Though the word 'best practices' has emerged only now, we had begun to uncover what we called successful endeavours; and our next set of case studies was of effective endeavours in adult education of women—a kind

of analysis of types of pedagogy rather than organisational histories. Dr Madhuri Shah, Chairperson of the UGC at that time, not only used it but took the larger list from which we selected five. Thus the wagon rolled on, with our case studies being supplied to the Ministries of Education, Labour, etc. We were a focal point for the uncovering of ground-level work.

This asset then defined the methodology for our research. Since we were also doing studies, especially in data collection—whether it was of workers in the Khadi and Village Industries network, bidi-rolling, seri-culture, prawn-peeling, minor forest produce, mining or a dozen other occupations—we always partnered with a grassroots agency and this became our methodology. This asset also yielded documents, such as ISST's contribution to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, which was called 'Voices of poor women on population policies'.

There were many spaces for joint endeavours in advocacy. The various advisory committees of government and the working groups for the plans brought together CV/DS, ISST and SEWA. For example, Scarlet Epstein organised the first ever programme on gender, a three month course during 1976-77 at IDS, Sussex called 'Women in rural development'. She invited Vina Muzumdar and myself as co-directors and ICSSR sponsored Ela Bhatt and Padma Ramachandran (then the Joint Secretary, Bureau for Women, Government of India). We also worked together on different issues, and protests: it could be said that all of us knew all of us. If it was Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), then it was SEWA, ISST and some others who designed the scheme and then monitored it. If it was the Equal Remuneration Act, CWDS and ISST were selected by the Ministry of Labour to be the Inspectors. When Dr M. S. Swaminathan wanted to follow up the 1975 conference, with a focus on women, he invited Vina Mazumdar and me to review the Agricultural Universities from the perspective of women as economic agents, and not just as





recipients of home science education. Vina Mazumdar and I were also delegates to the first and only NAM conference on women, convened before the UN World Conference at Mexico.

Our twin journey—academic as well as grass-roots—was not always an advantage, however morally satisfying. We could neither claim to be a research centre nor a strong action-oriented women's organisation. The response to this kind of research was not always supportive either. The catalogue and the selection process caused irritation as much because of inclusion as for exclusion, inviting the abuse that we were brokers for the donors. The work on interventions in development design, our work with the Sericulture Project and with the Dairy programme, which we presented as a paper in the preparations for the 1980 Copenhagen conference, was seen as reformist, and not revolutionary.

These criticisms made us learn and we grew out of this mode of work as we too began to challenge the existing structures and processes, top-down projects and the World Bank itself. On the whole, the research journey of ISST has been exciting and there was a sense of pioneering in both the revelations and their follow-up.

## Organisation

ISST invented itself as an organisation beginning with one researcher in 1975, then acquired another, with a few in the field and by 1994 had as many as 30 researchers between Delhi and Bangalore. Sometimes a person came in and we gave her a place, then set about finding a role and finances for her. The Counselling Centre, for example, was started that way. Most of our personnel came in through friends asking if there was some work they could do and often we took her in, and a project grew around her. For example, one of the pillars, the late Pushpa Rani, a physically challenged woman started that way on Rs 300 a month and later became the Administrator, the central pivot, the knowledge base, the Public Relations Officer (PRO), the everything of ISST. So did Manju Misra, now

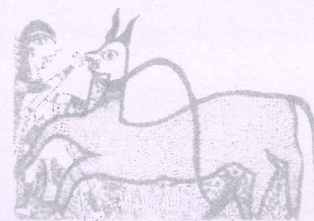
Associate Director. Raj Viridi came as mother of Mallika Viridi but is now the life of the Counselling Centre. G.R.N. Moorthy, another ISST stalwart and Revathi Narayanan, now with Mahila Samakhya are similar examples. The ISST family got built by these people who sought it out.

The question then became how to provide. The constant end-of-the-month scramble for salaries was exhausting. This led us to seek freedom from the market which in turn led to fund-raising for the endowment. This required enormous performance, output and individual energy towards writing, lecturing and travelling. The effort was rewarded. By 1994 we had an Endowment Fund that enabled us to start a Provident Fund type of scheme. This was a great achievement for us. We also had a building fund and a publications fund (with the royalties of books), and hoped to start a pension fund.

We also went to the government and this is a story that must be recorded. We argued with the government that while they denounce the fact that NGOs take money from foreigners; (the Kudal Commission and similar witch hunts had been going on India in the late seventies and early eighties leading to FCRA etc.) they were not willing to support NGOs except in the meanest of ways. The government had a scheme for organisations like ISST, where they would give Rs 50,000 a year if we could show that our expenditure was more than our income, and at the level of Rs 1 lakh a year. For two years we tried to write proposals and schemes which would help them to move beyond this margin, since our budget was at least 3 lakhs per year by then. We then took up the case for 10 agencies like us—Anveshi, Chetana and Vimochana are some of them.

We wrote up a case for Rs 5 crores for a five-year plan with Rs 1 crore set aside per year for 10 agencies, which were to be given Rs 10 lakhs each as a grant-in-aid. We could provide meaningful service to social, economical and political agencies, who were working towards justice. The scheme was not only finalised, even an Expenditure Finance Committee (ESC) was drafted, but it just did not go through. Even today,

*ISST invented itself as an organisation beginning with one researcher in 1975, then acquired another, with a few in the field and by 1994 had as many as 30 researchers between Delhi and Bangalore.*





organisations like ISST do not have any regular scheme of support and are driven by projects which can often exhaust the office and most of all, its leader or director.

The establishment of the Bangalore branch in 1981 was a major milestone in the evolution of the organisation. Beginning with a study commissioned by the government of Karnataka, the initial nucleus of this team consisted of the recently retired Director of the Department Women's Welfare as it was called then, and a retired accountant from the Hindustan Machine Tools factory! We were given a room in the Secretariat, in the Planning Department. As our team grew and space became an issue, we moved to the premises of the Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation, and stayed there till 1993. A series of research projects were initiated with the Government of Karnataka being the end user. Some of these projects involved intensive fieldwork and large sample surveys that compelled research teams to camp in the field. This approach to fieldwork differed from that of the Delhi office which invariably organised its fieldwork in partnership with a local NGO, largely because it was difficult to find young educated women who were willing to live in villages for long periods. Young scholars like Dr U. Kalpagam, Dr Gita Sen and Dr Srilata Batlivala joined as resource-persons, guided by the eminent macro-economist Dr K.S. Krishnaswamy.

Over the years 1975-85, ISST's Board of Trustees was built around various types of interest and expertise. A pioneer in child health and discrimination against female infants, two women activists, a mainstream academic economist, a diplomat and a specialist in rural management formed our Board. Trustees here were often an additional 'staff' resource 'on call', not only identifying areas of research but enabling the research and offering their time to the organisation. For example, two of the Bangalore trustees would visit the office every week to guide the team there. In Delhi, trustees were in charge of management, developing the salary scale and even the financial system. They

often led meetings, and skill development, and represented us in other fora.

### The balance sheet

In assessing the ISST experience it seems best to see it in two time phases, as well as in terms of 'issues'.

Between 1977 and 1985-87, ISST was in fast forward mode—its output of research, its outreach to grass-roots organisations of women and its organisational strength, both in finance and team workers, multiplied by ten. The advantages of this overdrive are easy to guess, the organisation reached a pinnacle of visibility and reputation. The personnel had high exposure including at the Nairobi World Conference in 1985, but more importantly, to the various luminaries in the women's movement both in India and abroad, with whom they mingled.

However, there was a flip side to the activities, especially the more exciting as well as ambitious ones such as the birth and nurturing of DAWN in the little office at 5, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg. DAWN was like a hurricane which swept the organisation in its wake, but it also, in a sense, cracked it. It was too much for each one. The energy, the writing as well as the mobilising that is required of the individual, namely myself, was too much and led to incompetence in handling the outcome and the post-outcome period. I felt a strong sense of withdrawal and it was this sense of 'it is too much, I cannot bear it' that started at Nairobi and persisted post-Nairobi for the next nine years which even led me to 'retire myself'. Simultaneously, it put team members into a spin which, while giving them the opportunity to participate, also exposed them to a form of hierarchy and levels of experience and competence which disturbed what was a quiet evolution within the small space of the organisation. Fast forward also meant stress for the administrative and financial managers. Many projects, most of them small, required enormous jigsaw puzzle fitting to come out at the end of the year.





Fast forward also meant that while much research was being done, much time was also taken up in advocacy, which meant that reports did not get published or put into high quality formats like papers. At every meeting of the collectivity and every meeting of the trustees, these ideas were put forward so as 'to be done', but they did not get done. Many valuable manuscripts, like the case studies on Adult Education for Women, the report on the women workers in the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Sites, the Study of Mining in the Himalayas, and many more lay unprinted and unpublished despite decisions to have a series of working papers and books. There was no money for hiring outside skills.

One important aspect of our character, was the multiple roles each of us took on. There was no peace, as we had to hop from being researcher to manager to lobbyist. Suggestions such as that an administrator was required, turned out to be unsatisfactory as he/she could not understand the needs of the project coordinator. So we settled on another innovative structure called the Coc, the Committee of Co-ordinators, consisting of our own researchers, who would take collective decisions on most managerial issues.

Apart from multiple roles for the individuals there were also the multiple roles of ISST-research, documentation service, preparing notes for policy-making bodies, being the nucleus of a network, advocacy, counselling and action. While this fits in with the main characteristic of ISST mentioned earlier, as growing in response to the demands expressed in the outside space, in retrospect I would say this kind of multiple presence is unwise and untenable. Yet because most women studies centres have a commitment to social justice, there is also a compulsion, moral or political, to take the shape the 'customer' demands. A point to consider.

The next phase, i.e., 1985-94, a period of consolidation, was also mixed in its pleasures and pains. The flow of income and visibility continued, there was greater security and managerial

innovations. Quite a few of the team had opportunities to go abroad for improving specific skills and due to the overseas experience, a middle cadre emerged which had its own place both in the house and outside, as the ISST people. Bangalore-Delhi connections were deepened. A second line of leadership emerged naturally in both places consisting of persons who had worked in the organisation for more than, say, three years and had begun to identify themselves with it.

However these were also the years of strain in relationships between part-timers and full-timers, between those who came with a long background in research and those who had learned it hands-on at ISST, those who provided consultancy for specific papers and those who provided the fodder for that exercise. Our heterogeneity, our meagre space and our overstretched means, were tiring us out.

The breakdowns of 'fast forward' revealed the need to settle the organisation with rules, regulations, finance and a few focus projects. Thus, 85/87-94 saw fewer but better-financed projects and recruitment of staff through advertisements and selection committees. Pay scales, grades, increments, provident fund, leave rules, etc. were settled. The reputation of the previous period was sufficient to cause donors to give larger grants. Also the momentum of the decade and the visibility and importance of the inclusion of gender in all development analysis and projects, made a large market for organisations like ISST.

Even as we were thus stabilising, there was a real debate within the organisation, especially initiated by the trustees, questioning the direction the organisation was taking in terms of becoming an 'office' and not a service station. Trustees at ISST had always been strong partners and one important aspect of our pioneering stage, which is perhaps true of other beginnings, is the involvement of trustees. Several of our trustees came from voluntary organisations and saw ISST as a service organisation, and wanted to keep its ethic as a service station for the 'Women in poverty' movement. However, the team had

*Fast forward also meant that while much research was being done, much time was also taken up in advocacy, which meant that reports did not get published or put into high quality formats like papers.*





*Though initially the founding call was feminist in nature, the team could not identify itself with that label—partly because they came from diverse backgrounds. The move towards a commitment to women's rights emerged out of the work and not because of a prior ideological impulse.*

other demands on its time—the regimenting and time inputs that project-driven work demanded, such as timely reports, constant hopping-on-toes for the next month's wherewithal, and meeting the monetary needs of women who were supporting their families and therefore were looking for employment and not voluntary work.

This issue of identity and ethic remained an unresolved aspect of ISST's evolution and location in the landscape of non-governmental organisations. We were everywhere and nowhere because of this lack of definition. The scholars respected and befriended us but we were not considered part of the academic cohort. We did not teach, or offer courses of any kind, nor could we. The activists also regarded us well, but we were not in the core of any activist forum for public action as, for example, the Seven Sisters, or the all-India campaigns spearheaded by the Left or the autonomous women's centres' networks. Perhaps our closest allies were the Gandhian organisations and networks as we did use and partner a great deal with the Gandhi Peace Foundation, the Gandhian Ashrams and their movements, including SEWA a great deal. Nevertheless, we could not adopt the Gandhian ethic either in our clothing or consumer behaviour, as they did.

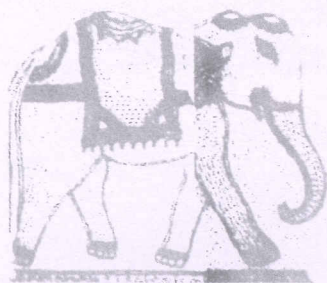
Though initially the founding call was feminist in nature, the team could not identify itself with that label—partly because they came from diverse backgrounds. The move towards a commitment to women's rights emerged out of the work and not because of a prior ideological impulse. We were a curious place, attempting many feminist methods, but singularly non-ideological as a group. We were not a homogenous group either ideologically, or in terms of a category such as academic or cardholding members of a party or a trade union. Yet we were a team and looking back, a racing, productive team.

We attempted, however, or perhaps experimented with what we considered, or may be, what I considered, were feminist ideals. How should one deal with power, as it relates to

hierarchies and permanence? So, in order to reduce the inequalities in power as they are related to income, we kept the distance between us in salaries, short, with the highest not more than Rs 3,500 and the lowest at Rs 500 per month. In retrospect, it is interesting to recall how we felt somewhat shocked when in 1985 a consultant wanted Rs 5,000 per month. However small the space, we all sat together with no partitions—both in Delhi and Bangalore, this was an often noted feature of ISST which reduced the distances created by cubicles and the difference in roles. For example, usually typists and accountants are separated from the academic or the 'literate'. But we thought we were being feminist if we mixed up those distances and there was no particular table or space belonging to the director. Sitting in one hall close to each other meant that everybody knew everything—visitors, letters, discussions—so that there was rarely any need for writing notes or 'file' movement. It was again an interpretation of feminism, the 'ideal' of detachment from power-centricity, the image of a 'collective' rather than an 'ikon' that led me to move out of directorship.

The flip side of this is that, many of those who had to concentrate on reading and writing found the 'marketplace-like' atmosphere of one crowded gallery, irritating and disturbing. Not everyone felt there was a method in the madness. The ethic was not one that had emerged through any form of group therapy or political background. In any case, as we had grown on an 'as and when basis', we were too heterogeneous even to try to build that common purpose.

In the period 1975-85, the mode of formation of women's organisations had a certain ideological and emotional content which required it to be self-conscious about its institutional structure. The fashion was to have collectivities. Feminism connoted a voluntary spirit, non-hierarchical collectivities and ideal centres (such as Vimochana in Bangalore). Many others who were also making their mark, were the ideals. There were another set of organisations—mass-based as for example SEWA, where the cadres





were drawn by the desire to 'serve the poor' and identified themselves with the working class. The 'institutes' (like ISST) would intersect with these other more ideologically drawn organisations, and this pushed them into thinking of their internal format and issues. Discussions always left the team at ISST unhappy because the collectivity seemed to be more attractive, less hierarchical and less encumbered with the pressures of 'leader' and 'led' that they were suffering from. On the other hand, the overall pressure of delivering reports and papers in return for the funding was pushing these centres into becoming more 'boxed'. Strict demands by the organisation instigated strict demands by the 'workers'.

But we could not stop discussing what we were. A professional organisation like Institute of Economic Growth or Centre for Women's Development Studies? Or a consultancy organisation such as Industrial Development Services, on a smaller scale? Or a feminist collective or voluntary organisation of the old days where the spirit of service and voluntariness made moral demands with no remuneration? It seemed important to sort this out, as on that depended our organisational rules, salaries, allowances, holidays, entitlements, etc. These were some of our internal debates and stresses.

This ambiguity of 'shape' and 'location', if we can use that term instead of identity, was also a factor in what can be called the nature of continuity in the organisation. Although a second line of leadership emerged which was self-confident and competent, the organisation could not hold them. It is not surprising that it is the brightest of the professionals who left, while the 'solid' workers remained. By the 1990s, this exit could also be due to changes external to the organisation. The organisation's role and purpose was not embedded in any specific guidelines or orientation. It was in people and their lived experience.

By the 1990s, gendering of development had become a strong presence, especially among donors and international agencies, including the

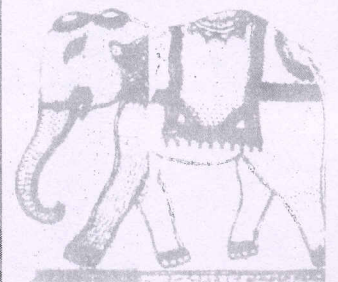
World Bank. The opportunities as well as the demand for gender specialists and the reward structures had expanded by ten or more times and many of the best of our teams either married and had to change residence or left due to the frenzy of activity, or had better offers and looked for a change. This emptied the vessel just when it was full.

There was both a recognition that there was something called gender analysis of everything under the sun, as well as a demand for those who had soiled their hands with the issue. There were also many more small and big organisations and networks amongst them, engaged in the domain of women's rights and concerns of so many typologies. The excitement of discovery and argument, the movement driving the organisations was perhaps overshadowed by the market demand for gendering. The clients were different, as was the predominant environment. In a strange way this made for more structured space, more critique of ourselves from inside and from outside, more professionalisation, and perhaps less open spaces.

I would guess that this also determined the internal dynamics, losses and gains of ISST. It also shaped the outcome of the transition to a new leadership, as change had to take place in a different kind of space. In retrospect the experiment with feminist 'ways', rewarding as it was, had not taken enough root to survive change. But the institutional structure was strong, as was the track record and core staff who stayed on. The outside had changed, and the organisation was small and flexible enough to adapt to that change.

The space today is larger, it is more populated and more diverse and the biennial NCWS proves this each time. However, the space is also demanding more structure and more specificity—partitioning and 'specialisation'. Within universities, the centres are perhaps responding to the kind of education the market needs right now, whether it is a commercial or an academic market. Outside, in the spaces that organisations like ISST occupy, finding a niche is probably more necessary and also more difficult. ■

*The organisation's role and purpose was not embedded in any specific guidelines or orientation. It was in people and their lived experience.*





*Devaki Jain graduated from Oxford, and taught economics at the University of Delhi. She was the Founder-Director of Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) till 1994. She received an Honorary Doctorate (1999) from the University of Durban, Westville, Republic of South Africa and was awarded the Bradford Morse Memorial Award (1995) by UNDP at the Beijing World Conference. She was a visiting Fellow at Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex (1993), and*

*a Fulbright Senior Fellow attached both to Harvard University and Boston University (1984). She was also a Fellow at the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen (1983). She has been a member of the Government of Karnataka's State Planning Board, a member of the UGC's Standing Committee on Women's Studies, and of the South Commission chaired by the late Dr Julius Nyerere. She has authored and edited many publications both jointly and singly.*

Source: "Reproduced from Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput (eds): *Narratives from the Women's Studies Family: Recreating Knowledge* C University Grants Commission, 2003. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of the copyright holders and the publishers, Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, India".

## Notes

1. See Jain (1975).
2. See Jain and Chand (1982). 3. See Jain (1982).
4. See Jain (1981).
5. See Jain, Singh and Chand (1979). 6. See Jain, Singh and Chand (1979). 7. See Jain and Banerjee (eds) (1985). 8. See Jain (1983b).
9. See Sen and Grown (1987).

## References

Devaki Jain (1975), *Indian Women*, New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

——— (1985), 'The Household Trap: Report on a Field Survey of Female Activity Patterns', in Devaki Jain and Nirmala Banerjee (eds), *Tyranny of the Household*, New Delhi: Vikas.

——— (1996), 'Valuing Work: Time as a Measure' in *Economic and Political Weekly*.

——— (1982), 'Indian Women: Today and Tomorrow', Padmaja Naidu Memorial Lecture.

——— (1981), 'Patterns of Female Work: Implications for Statistical Design, Economic Classification and Social Priorities', paper prepared for National Conference on Women's Studies, Bombay.

——— (1978), 'Are Women a Separate Issue?' in *Mainstream*, August issue on *Women as a Subset of the Poor*.

Devaki Jain, N. Singh, and M. Chand (1979), *Women's Quest for Power-Five Case Studies*, sponsored by the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi: Vikas.

Devaki Jain (1983a), *Integrating Women's Interest into a State Five Year Plan* (3 volumes), Sponsored by Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of India, A Study Conducted by ISST.

——— (1983b), *Development as if women mattered—can women build a new paradigm?* Paris: OECD.

Gita Sen and Karen Grown (1987), 'Development Crises and Alternatives Visions: Third World Women's Perspective' in *Monthly Review Press*.

