

# 2023-2024 ANNUAL **REPORT**

ISD Celebrates its 20 Years !



We Stand *for*  
PEACE, HARMONY and DEMOCRACY

*isd* | 20 *years*  
ANNIVERSARY  
INSTITUTE *for*  
SOCIAL DEMOCRACY



## ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

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INSTITUTE for SOCIAL DEMOCRACY  
Flat No. 110, Numberdar House  
62-A, Laxmi Market, Munirka  
New Delhi-110067, INDIA  
Phone & Telefax : 091-11-26177904  
Email : notowar.isd@gmail.com  
Website : [www.isd.net.in](http://www.isd.net.in)

### IN-CO-OPERATION WITH

Bread for the World - Protestant Development Service  
P. O. Box 40144  
D-10061 Berlin  
Federal Republic of Germany  
[www.info.brot-fuer-die-welt.de](http://www.info.brot-fuer-die-welt.de)

### MISEREOR

Catholic Central Office  
for Development and EB  
PO Box 10 15 45,  
52015 Aachen, Germany

### WRITTEN and EDITED

Babita Negi, Ainie Naqvi, Sheraz Mansoor Ahmed

### ILLUSTRATIONS and COVER DESIGN

Surender Singh, Annie Mookerji



## MESSAGE from THE DESK

20 years of working on Composite Heritage as a tool for peace building is a mixed bag of successes and failures, of joys and sorrows, of holding on and letting go. A journey that started with great passion, commitment and unshakable resolve of our dear Khurshid Sir, the founder of Institute for Social Democracy, the one who conceived the idea of Composite Heritage as a tool for peace building and the one who envisioned the need for a consistent movement for peace, is a collection of very encouraging experiences and learning.

While looking back when we started with capacity building workshops, training of trainers and publications the focus was to build a network of organizations and a pool of trainers to expand the idea of Composite Heritage. With the changing context we added new strategies and ways of reaching out to community through mainstreaming initiatives and gradually started to focus towards women and youth and alliance building with likeminded organizations through accompaniment process. Our research and publications shifted from being only socio-political analysis centric to adding specific researches on various forms of Composite Heritages. This annual report attempts to give a glimpse of our work of last one year and is a reflection of journey so far.

While reaching 20 year milestone is encouraging, it is also a good time to reassess our strategies and re-visioning the change we want to bring and how it will happen. I am reminded of how Khurshid sir would explain, "The agenda is always set by those who benefit from the conflicts and violence. The response of civil society is mere reactionary. There needs to be a sustained effort to strengthen the shared cultural heritage that has brought communities together." This responsibility lies with not just with ISD but with all those who believe in the values of peace, harmony, democracy, dignity, inclusion, acceptance. It is our prime responsibility to pass on these values and the shared heritage to the next generation. Whether ISD will survive the epidemic of hate and violence, or not only time can tell, but the idea of Composite Heritage as a peace building tool should not die, will not die.



## INSTITUTE *for* SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Institute for Social Democracy came into existence in the backdrop of unprecedented violent conflict that South Asia has witnessed over several decades. Now they have become a routine affair. Thousands of women, men and children fell victim to this madness. ISD was established by late Dr. Khurshid Anwar and its work on Composite Heritage was his brainchild. ISD has chosen Composite Heritage as a tool for conflict transformation and violence prevention as no other organisation has yet taken it up. Composite Heritage is chosen as a tool, because of the fact that irrespective of the caste, religion and gender every individual relates to it. It belongs to masses, not an individual. The initial objective of ISD was to provide a common platform for groups and individuals committed to secularism and democracy, to explore and affirm Composite Heritage as a basis for peace and democracy. With this objective in mind, we initiated our intervention through the perspective building and capacity building on the context of conflict and bringing Composite Heritage as a tool to restore Peace, Harmony and Democracy. Through our interventions, we learnt that there is almost total lack of peace movements in the context of sectarian violent and non-violent conflict such as communal, caste, ethnic, linguistic and regional conflicts. In sub-continent, there is a movement for peace when it comes to war and nuclear race issues. There is also a strong and significant feminist movement but when it comes to conflicts mentioned above, our efforts become only reactive. We assume that there is peace because there is no visible conflict. We remain until and unless we are confronted with violent conflicts. Once the violent conflict is invisible, we again assume that there is peace. The biggest lesson that we learnt through these years is that the absence of violent conflict does not mean peace. We also learnt that there are always sources of tension present in the society and they become visible as and when the forces behind the sources become proactive. On the contrary, we also realize that in a given society there are always "Local Capacities for Peace" present. Though we always require them to remain on the surface and help to keep peace and harmony intact we hardly become proactive. During our journey we have evolved not just as an organisation but also the concept of Composite Heritage has evolved and new dimensions are added to it.

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# 01

## ISD VISION and MISSION

### VISION

To build a social structure based on peace, harmony and democratic values while accepting social and cultural diversity and establishing dialogue with mutual respect.

### MISSION

- To identify, understand and collect, different forms of Composite Heritage at community level, through research and dialogues.
- Mainstreaming of the concept of Composite Heritage through different mediums for the sake of democratic values.
- To encourage the youth, like-minded groups and different peace networks for contributing on peace and harmony by enhancing their knowledge and social analysis.

### BELIEF

ISD believes in establishing a dialogue with different social groups and connects with them with full respect towards their social and cultural aspirations and without doubting their intentions. ISD dreams of building secular and democratic society based on human development and dignity of human rights.

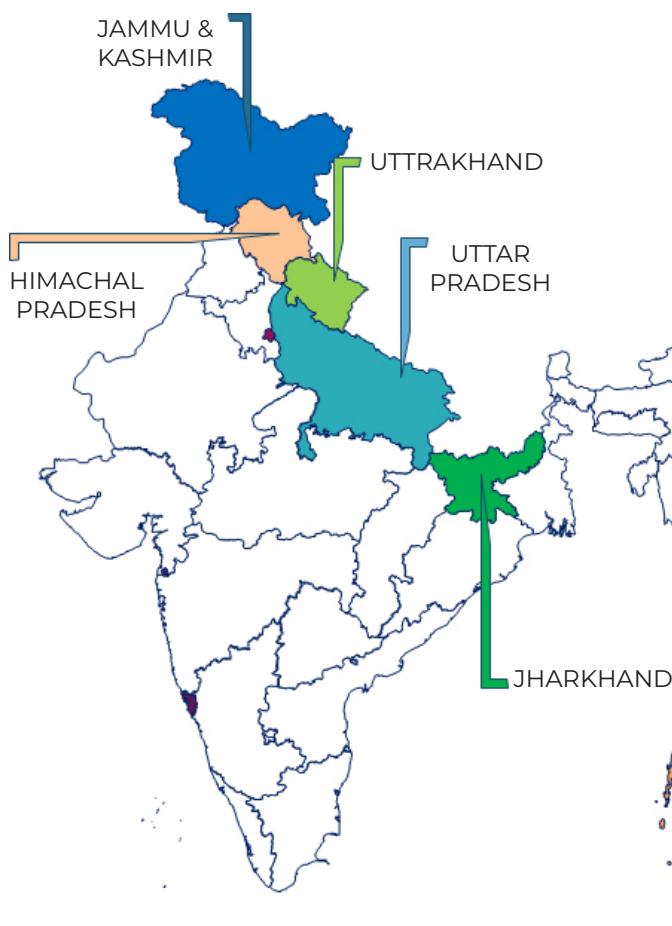
ISD has chosen Composite Heritage as a tool for Conflict Transformation, Violence Prevention and Peace Building among different communities as a response to the decades of conflicts, both violent and non-violent in nature. Composite Heritage is chosen as a tool, because of the fact that irrespective of caste, religion, gender every individual relates to it. Composite Heritage belongs to no individual, it belongs to the masses. It is only then it is Composite Heritage.



# 02 GEOGRAPHICAL REACH of ISD

Field intervention for mainstreaming of Composite Heritage and LCP programme.

## INSTITUTE for SOCIAL DEMOCRACY PHYSICAL PRESENCE



### JAMMU & KASHMIR

Kashmir (Bathnoor, Karamullah, Hergam, Reshipora in Pulwama Jammu (Dhollian, Tanda, Bassi, Kabir Nagari in Samba, Govindpur-A and B, Kirpal, Kukhyal in Kathua



### HIMACHAL PRADESH

Teel, Khamarada, Jhamach, Barnala, Palicha, Bachhut, Chunahan, Pedcha, Alwah, Diona Jamali, Gashini, Thachdhar, Gadagussain, Kauli, Pattan and Ghat



### UTTARAKHAND

Nai, Chamachopda, Thali, Harinagar, Sunderkali, Khujeti, Chakdalai, Pashya, Kodor, Sunkiya



### UTTAR PRADESH

ALLAHABAD ( Karelabagh, Sanjay Nagar, Mausariya, Sewaith, Kahra, Chakadam, Bhatni and Saraiya) JAUNPUR ( Kalil Gorari, Saiyad Gorari, Kanwariya, Sheikh Sarai, Mansoorpur, Mahroda, Sondhi, Khetasarai, Sahganj, Khajurahat, Marufpur, Rasoolpur Khoda, Neta Nagar, Kajiyana, Gadhiya, Judaupur, Kadanpur, Saraiyusuf) and SAHARANPUR



### JHARKHAND

Bachcha Singh Basti, Siddh Kanhu Basti Zone 2, Birsa Basti, Jahira Basti, Chuna Bhatta, Khair Bani, Macchua Basti, Panchvati Nagar, Mirzadih, Patipani, Sonari, Govindpur Gitti Machin Basti, Khuntimakli.

Reaching out to readers and network partners through Publication and Workshops in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Jammu Kashmir, Jharkhand, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Manipur, Madhya Pradesh, North East, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.



# 03 OUR WORK



## COMPOSITE HERITAGE

Composite Heritage is a broader term, comprising two words. Composite refers to shared and common that belongs to all, not one individual. Heritage includes something which is passed from one generation to another generation. So, Composite Heritage is something which is coming from generation to generation and is shared or common to all of us. We all feel sense of ownership and right on these heritages, which have been developed by people of different identities. They all feel equally proud of it despite being different.



## LOCAL CAPACITIES for PEACE

Our LCP work takes inspiration from this analytical framework of Mary B Anderson's book, 'Do No Harm' to train team members and communities, (especially the youth), to understand problems which continue to plague a community. The aim is to strengthen their skills in conflict analysis and, encourage collaborations between different actors. The idea is to identify roles of local communities in generating preventive action and response to conflict. One of the agendas is to capacitate youth so that they can play a fundamental role in furthering our work of peace-building.

# C4 COMPOSITE HERITAGE and LCP with CROSS CUTTING ISSUES



## UNDERSTADING GENDER

ISD engages with women and youth on various issues such as gender discrimination, gender-based violence and witch hunting practices etc. and helps them in understanding that how these issues are linked with negative Composite Heritages within society. We also ensure women get a safe space to share their experiences and they took active part in different activities to eliminate negative Composite Heritages.





## ENVIRONMENT and CLIMATE CHANGE

The Youth and Children are becoming aware of Environment and Climate change and are celebrating world environment day as part of Composite Heritage. Youth building awareness through street play and rallies among village people on environment protection. Communities that we are working with are trying to implement traditional methods and practices of farming in their agricultural field.



## EQUALITY and EQUITY

ISD is working with communities of different caste, class, gender and religion. We share and discuss about equality and equity among them, developing an understanding how, despite of differences, we all are equal and have equal rights. There should be just and fair inclusion and an equitable society that allows all to reach their full potential.



## EDUCATION

ISD provides alternative education along with curriculum to youth and children. We provide them learning and understanding of society and culture.



## YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

ISD empowers youth to make informed decisions in favour of united community, environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society for present and future generations. We aim to provide the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to address sustainable development challenges.

# REACHING OUT TO COMMUNITY

## **YOUTH WOMEN and CHILDREN GROUPS PROMOTING INCLUSIVE, SHARED HERITAGE THROUGH COMPOSITE HERITAGE.**

ISD believes that youths are like a bridge between generation, if we need to reach out to the community at a larger level we need to take them along. Youth groups of ISD's are taking part in different activities and helping in mainstreaming the concept of Composite Heritage.



## 41 Youth Groups

have been developed in field of Allahabad and Jaunpur of Uttar Pradesh, Jamshedpur in Jharkhand kullu and Mandi in Himachal Pradesh, Nainital in Utrrakhand, Srinagar and Tral in Kashmir and Kathua and Samba in Jammu.

## 14 Youth Leaders

from different field areas running ISD centers for promoting concept of Composite Heritage among children and women.



## 557 Youths

are directly involved in ISD activities and programmes.





Formation of strong women groups in field areas and activities has led to the women empowerment in villages and bastis of field area. Women those got connected through Composite Heritage and LCP have become more aware about their rights. Women groups actively and continuously engaging in activities and implementing the grassroot level ideas at their community level.

## 32 Women Groups

have been developed in field of Allahabad and Jaunpur of Uttar Pradesh, Jamshedpur in Jharkhand, Kullu and Mandi in Himachal Pradesh, Nainital in Uttarakhand, Pulwama and Tral in Kashmir, Kathua and Samba in Jammu.



## 434 Women

are directly involved in ISD activities and programmes.

Through ISD Composite Heritage centres continues engagement with children have been made and their understanding on the concept through games, art and craft is done by youth leaders.

## 200 Children

are directly involved in ISD activities and programmes.



## 12 Children Groups

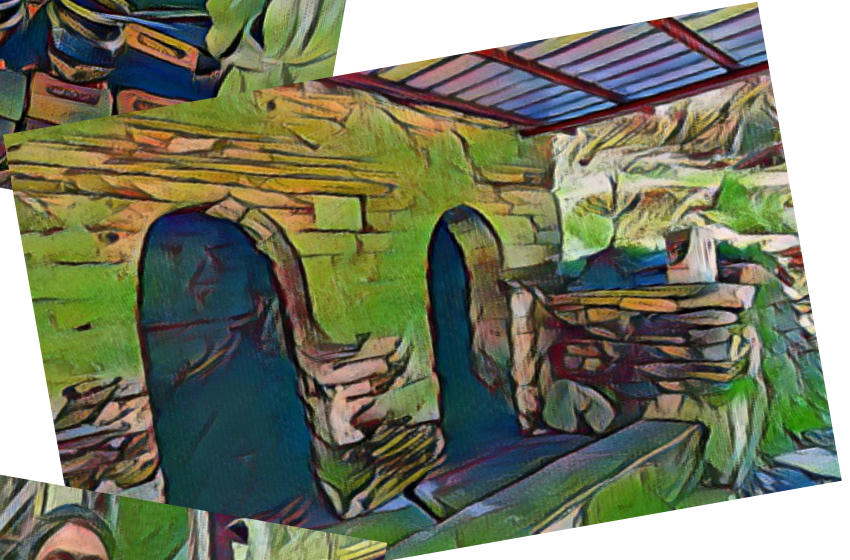
have been developed in field of Allahabad and Jaunpur of Uttar Pradesh, and Nainital in Uttarakhand.

# PRESERVING and PROMOTING FORMS of COMPOSITE HERITAGES

Reviving lost forms of Positive Composite Heritages is equally important as recognizing them. ISD, with the help of communities, recognizes as well as revives forms of Composite Heritage through various activities. Traditional food items, games and folk art/songs etc. are in the process of being revived in our field areas.









# ACCOMPANIMENT PROCESS at NATIONAL LEVEL



ISD has initiated an Accompaniment process on Composite Heritage through which the idea is to mainstream this approach in the organizational work culture, strategies and policies for a sustained, long-term change at personnel as well as structural level. The main idea behind the accompaniment process is to help organisations incorporate shared heritage values through a sustained hand-holding by ISD. The process is an extension of introducing the concept to organizations, to walk along in the journey of mainstreaming it and making it a cross-cutting issue.

## NATIONAL LEVEL

Workshops on Composite Heritage was conducted with Lok Samiti Banaras, UttraPradesh, Peoples Action for Development, TamilNadu and Pipal Tree Bangalore Karnataka.





# MAINSTREAMING of COMPOSITE HERITAGE

248

ACTIVITIES WERE CONDUCTED IN ALLAHABAD, JAUNPUR, HIMACHAL PRADESH, JHARKHAND, HARYANA, UTTARAKHAND, JAMMU AND KASHMIR FOR THE MAINSTREAMING OF COMPOSITE HERITAGE AND LCP PROGRAMME.



97

One day events and celebration to understand Composite Heritage and its revival.

55

One day and three-day Composite Heritage Workshops

45

Meetings on different social issues and Composite Heritage with community and key people

21

Gender Workshops

15

Exposure Visits

09

LCP Workshops and Meetings

03

Social Analysis Workshops

03

Street Play organised by Youth Groups



# ORIENTATION WORKSHOPS on COMPOSITE HERITAGE and TRAINING of TRAINERS

5

Orientation Workshops were organised by ISD with youth, NGO representatives and key people in Gwalior Madhya Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Tamilandu.

1

Training of Trainers (TOT) was organised with ISD staff and youth volunteers and NGO leaders from different field areas in Delhi.





# 10 LEARNING and SHARING VISITS

**Knowledge might be power, but it's much more powerful when it's shared! If only one person knows how to do something, that prevents others from developing and can hinder your organization's progress. Keeping this in view ISD this year organized learning and sharing visits in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.**

Team Visited Pithorabad in Madhypradesh and met Padam Shri Babulal Dahiya ji to understand the different socio-cultural aspects revolving around organic farming. Team also visited his museum where he has preserve all the Composite Heritages related to tradition farming. Team not only learned about the organic farming but various tradition methods as well for doing organic farming.

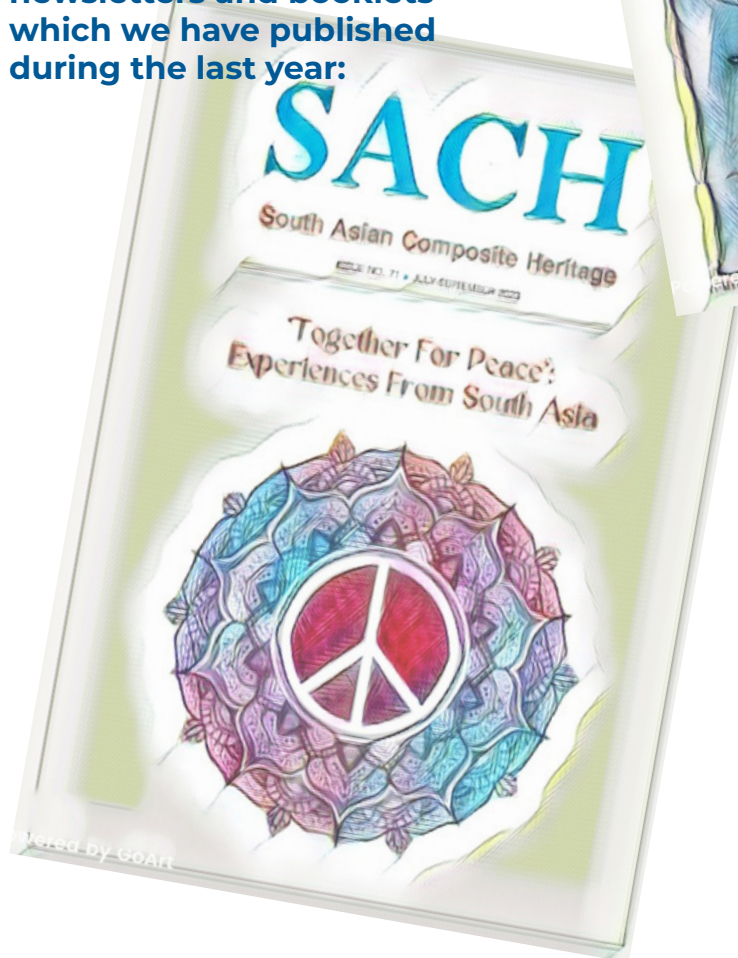


Team visited CASA organization in Chhattisgarh to understand their work with tribal communities and learn how people's organisations can be developed.



# 11 PUBLICATION

Writing, as a medium of expression, is quite radical as it opens the space to reiterate one's values and bridges the gap between the writer and the reader. Over the past few years, following the pandemic, we have moved all our publications online. The following are the newsletters and booklets which we have published during the last year:





# 12

## STORIES of CHANGE

### Breaking Barriers and Stereotypes -Laxmi

**Sanjay Nagar, Allahabad**

Married at a young age of 16, Lakshmi is already a mother of four children. She lived in an abusive marriage with her husband often getting drunk and beating her. She began attending meetings being hosted by ISD, when she realised that whatever was happening to her was wrong. She then discussed with the ladies of the colony and resolutely stated that no matter what anyone thought of her, she would no longer live with her husband and would live separately with her children. Lakshmi's perspective has changed significantly after attending meetings and programmes of ISD. She believes women and girls have the right to happiness as well. In addition, she believes that many erroneous and harmful customs exist in society and must be reformed through the efforts of ISD.

### Understanding the Importance of Education -Sujata

**Karelabagh, Allahabad**

Sujata Vanshkar is a resident of Karelabagh *basti*. She is twenty years old. ISD's intervention has been taking place in her colony as well. Sujata shares that since joining ISD, she has learned a lot about the dynamics of gender, Composite/Shared Heritage and other social issues and so on. She says that girls in her colony used to marry young, but through ISD's efforts and initiatives and their work here, there has been a shift in people's attitudes, and now everyone encourages the practice of getting the girls educated. Sujata also spreads awareness about the initiatives and programs with her friends. While concluding, she says that earlier, she used to believe in caste system and untouchability, but her views changed due to ISD's efforts and now she maintains a good comradery with everyone.

### Finding Space and Solace -Rakhi

**Karelabagh, Allahabad**

Rakhi does the work of rag picking which helps in meeting the expenses of the family. Having lived a very dull and monotonous life, devoting herself completely to her family, Rakhi says that ever since ISD commenced their work in her colony, she feels very good. Earlier, because of her obligations to household work and the family, she had forgotten to think about herself or even be happy. But ever since she started participating in the meetings and events organised by ISD, she's become more cheerful. With an enthused heart, she exclaims, "I am really pleased that ISD is working to preserve our traditional art forms and festivals which have been part of our legacy. It has surely made us much closer as a community!"



## Transformation of Negative Composite Heritage into Positive

### Sewaith Village, Allahabad

In July 2021, a three-day workshop on Composite Heritage was held in the village of Sewaith. In this workshop, the concept of Composite Heritage, and Negative Composite Heritage (CH) were discussed. The conversation also headed towards the *Gudiya Tyohaar* (Doll festival) and it was shared how the aspect (beating the dolls) of this festival warrants and justifies even more violence against women, so the present attendees decided that they will not participate in this festival and not beat the Gudiya this time. It was decided that from then onwards, they would not beat the doll, but make it swing. On the occasion of Nag Panchami, the children of the Sewaith center made the dolls together, and then a swing was hung from the Neem tree, and the doll was swung first, following which the girls present there also swayed on the ride.

When the Doll Festival came around again in August, the children from both the centers collaborated to create posters with the slogans:

- पीटे नहीं झुलाए जी, गुड़िया यूँ मनाएं जी। (Swing me, don't beat me, this is how let's celebrate the doll festival)
- बिटिया पढ़ाएंगे, गुड़िया झुलायेंगे। (Will teach the daughters and swing the doll)

This festival, however, is still observed by a small group in a large village such as Sewaith. Because a tradition that has been followed for years immemorial cannot be changed so quickly. Nevertheless, the transformation has already begun!

## Understanding Gender Roles and Freedom -Preeti Maurya

### Sewaith, Allahabad

Preeti lives in the village of Sewaith. She recalls that in seventh grade she first came in contact with ISD. Today, Preeti has completed her BA (Bachelor of Arts) and wishes to pursue a degree in MSW (Masters in Social Work) so that she can work in the social sector. She says that she cannot express in words the changes that have occurred in her life as a result of ISD's efforts and endeavors. Brimming with joy, she says, "I can proudly say that ISD has been fundamental in building my foundation. If I hadn't joined ISD, my thoughts and ideas could have been influenced by caste and religion or my perspective on gender would have been the same as that of the people around me. On the whole, there has been a great transformation in not only my thinking but also in my family's thought process and approach to life."

Reflecting on her past self, Preeti adds, "Previously, I used to hold women and girls responsible for issues such as eve-teasing, assault, and so on, but now I have learnt that when any injustice is being done to a woman, I stand with her as much as I can. I strive to assist in any way possible." She exclaims happily, that she can travel anywhere on her own; "My family trusts me, however sometimes, I have to persuade them. I am continuously making a conscious effort to expand my knowledge".

## **Gurubari Das- Breaking Chains of Patriarchy and Following her Dreams**

### **Jharkhand**

Among the major discussions on caste system in modern India, some flexibility has been stressed in regard to occupation and social interaction, especially in the urban setting. However, caste endogamy is continuing and couples who vouch for an inter-caste marriage are usually isolated or undergo persecution in various forms. One such case is of Gurubari Das, from Sarjom Hatu Basti Jharkhand, located on the banks of confluence of Subarnarekha river and Kharkai river.

Gurubari, belonging to the Adivasi community, married Abhishek Das, a Vaishnav Brahmin. The former has been a part of ISD's initiatives and programs for a long time. Gurubari faced several challenges while she attempted to settle in her new family. As she tried to break away the stereotypes and social hierarchies instilled in the family, the chains of control, inferiority and discrimination were further firmed and tightened. She was also being restricted from engaging in social activities and cessation for taking part in street plays and programs had to be taken as imperative. These circumstances had affected her emotionally and physically, that led her to share the issue with the larger group in order to find a solution to the problem.

She brought the problem to the youth group and asked for their assistance. The group reassured her and decided to have a dialogue with Gurubari's partner. The youth group talked to Abhishek and asked him to be more supportive and sensitive towards the aspirations of her wife. Abhishek was informed about the caliber of Gurubari and her potential to create an impact in the society through her art. Abhishek, understanding the intensity of the situation and realizing the turmoil his partner had been going through, assured everybody present there that he would take the necessary action to help Gurubari make out of this situation and relive her dreams. This stand taken by Abhishek gave Gurubari the confidence to regain autonomy over her life. Today, Gurubari Das is a part of various ISD programs and is taking her art to new heights with flying colors.

## **Youth Groups foster Awareness through Nukkad Natak In Govindpur Jharkhand**

Through its numerous initiatives, ISD Jharkhand has been consistently working with the people residing in Gitti Machine Basti, in Govindpur region, located in the north of Jamshedpur City, Jharkhand. The youth groups of ISD are engaged with the people of the Basti and encourage them to be part of various theater activities. Theatre as a creative expression of various aspects of humanity, society and individual reality has seemed important and is considered vital for social representation.

The youth groups along with the residents of Gitti Machine Basti prepared a Street Play centered around the theme of gender discrimination, to address the issue of rapidly intensifying cases of gender based violence and restrictions on women freedom. Another play was conceptualized to eradicate superstitious beliefs and practices dealing with branding women as "Daayan", popularly known as 'Dayan Pratha' or 'Witch Hunt'. These performances were made on the International Women's Day at distinct locations in the region.

The youth group initiatives in the region have catered in raising awareness towards various social evils and have made people more cautious of exploitative systems and cultures that propagate patriarchal ideas. The efforts must be appreciated and encouraged if one intends to smash and uproot evil practices to raise an equitable, just and peaceful society for everyone.

## Against the Odds : Story of Every Woman in the villages of Kashmir

There are common universal issues among societies that are deeply rooted into the structures built through the centuries. The customs, morals, values and ethics in various traditions are designed through the religiosity and other different ways that serves power to few classes while resulting in the oppression and 'othering' of the rest. Similar is the case with the villages of ISD's intervention where it was very challenging for ISD to change the rigid age old norms and survive. After doing so much of hard work, ISD to a great extent has been successful in changing these parameters of persecution and targeting and is still in the process. The girl youth particularly has changed the narrative of being a victim of moral incentives; being good, pious, obedient as a cultural construct that alienated their self from their potential and capacity. This came through their sharing on expressing their will to take part in every aspect of life like sports, athletes etc.

They said that ISD came into their lives with a power of realization that to stand against the wrong does not make them bad rather it is going to make their lives better. The women especially understood that the steps they are going to take for their rights will not only help them but also their daughters. They don't feel it's against the cultural norms, morals or values. One of the girl youths shared "we are from agrarian families and thus possess a strong stamina and we can compete and raise, that is something we never met in our consciousness maybe it was fear to think about it but now we rethink of what we can do as it's the first step of success in positive change".

### "Options are Always There" - Shamshada

Karamulla, Kashmir

Shamshada has a deep belief in women's empowerment and the ability of youth to contribute to building a new society. She is helping ISD in encouraging women to question gender roles within their own environments and become visible members of their communities.

Shamshada like other girls in her village Karamullah are facing societal challenges due to cultural norms that restrict or discourage higher education for girls in her village. Unfortunately, this is a situation that many individuals around the world still contend with, where traditional beliefs and gender stereotypes limit educational opportunities for girls and women. Karamullah village is one of the fields of ISD and Shamshada with time became one of the regular participants in our grassroots activities. After attending the activities on Composite Heritage, he shared the problems pertinent with gender and other important issues with ISD team members. It was important for both ISD and Shamshada to approach this situation with sensitivity, understanding the cultural context, and considering the potential consequences of challenging established norms. Building alliances and fostering open communication within the community are crucial steps in bringing about positive change.

After realizing her potential, ISD gave a safe space to Shamshada to express her views, opinions and sometimes her complaints towards the society. Also, she was given the opportunity to actively participate in activities and gain exposure to be more enthusiastic and active. These activities and programs which helped her to train herself for the coming challenges and taking a stand for herself. In the time being, she became one of the active and leading volunteers of ISD who is raising questions about every abnormal situation being normalised in her village. No matter what the consequences, even so she is trying her best to stand against wrong and exploitative parameters in patriarchal society. Breaking the narrative and standard of limiting higher studies of women in Karamullah village Shamshada has dared to pursue her higher education and make possible ways for other girls in her village too.

In the words of Shamshada, "ISD has taught me to believe in myself and always look for possible ways as they say that *options are always there*."



## Finding a Direction -Muhammad Abdullah

Tral, Kashmir

"We know we have longings in the society which can be addressed by listening and sharing each other's stories", Muhammad Abdullah.

A teacher, poet and also a storyteller Mohd Abdullah is a resident of Chewa Ullar village of Tral. He is one of the village heads and a member of Awqaaf committee Bathnoor. Being a senior member of the village, he has knowledge about the village and surrounding areas. When ISD entered the Bathnoor village, the team approached Mohd Abdullah and shared the concept of Composite Heritage with him. He appreciated the concept and assured the support in spreading the message of harmony and brotherhood. Thus, from the very beginning Mohd Abdullah is associated with ISD and from time to time is invited in meetings and activities as he makes them interesting by narrating his captivating stories and struggles that fascinates the youth groups. He was associated with the concept and process of Composite Heritage from the very beginning of his work in the village Bathnoor but he was not aware and sure about what makes diversities closer and connects one to the other. After the first meeting with ISD he was astonished that besides religious and other factors, culture can be a dominating tool of connectivity and sharedness.

Mohammad Abdullah shared, "as a single person it was very tough for me to bring people together though I have tried every strategy that I was aware of. After meeting ISD I came to know about the tool of Composite Heritage that can be used to explore the hidden links among the different communities, cultures, religions, sects and also removing the unjust patterns existing in our civilizations". He said that ISD came as a hope which gave a shape to the idea of collective identity through Composite Heritage.

The concept of Composite Heritage encouraged Mohd Abdullah collectively with Bashir Ahmad (who sustained a heritage from decades) in building a shared heritage "*Pir kyan*" (a shrine). Mohammad Abdullah was also encouraged to publish his writings that can be a source of harmony and togetherness among villages and tribes surrounding the Bathnoor village.

## Bridging Differences -Tamanna

Reshipora, Kashmir

Tamanna is one of the regular participants from youth group of Reshipora Tral. She is always curious for new learnings and always encourages friends and the near ones to participate in the activities of ISD as she has encouraged more than five people from her family to join the programs of ISD. It was observed that she is now growing into a young leader as she is trying to take lead in ISD's major activities.

She says "I had less knowledge about the concept of Composite Heritage and its contribution towards our society. I started participating in activities and my interest piqued day by day. Now I had understood that Composite Heritage provides important social and economic benefits. Increased tolerance and opportunities to come together with others. It enhances our quality of life and increases overall wellbeing for both individuals and communities because an individual owes its understanding to a certain community in which he has been brought up".

Tamanna belongs to '*Khaar*' community which is seen inferior to other existing communities in her village. She with some of the other members from her community joined ISD activities where participants from almost all communities were present and thus, she became an important factor in bridging the gap between the two communities which have delved in a state of latent hatred and conflict for a long time.

"I had never heard before about shared culture and compositeness I felt from day one that ISD came for our welfare. In ISD's activities, I found myself in a comfortable and safe space where I can share my feelings," said Tamanna.

## **Transformative Empowerment: Waheeda's Journey towards Gender-Neutral Education**

**Karamulla, Kashmir**

Waheeda, a young woman who entered matrimony in her early twenties, had been limited to primary school education in an environment where gender disparities in education were deeply ingrained. In her community, the prevailing perception dictated that girls should receive minimal education compared to their male counterparts. However, the intervention of ISD proved to be a catalyst for a profound transformation in Waheeda's mindset, prompting her to challenge age-old customs and embrace a more egalitarian approach to education for her children.

"In a dialogue with Waheeda, she revealed that ISD planted the seed of the profound idea in her mind: that her daughter, surpassing her son in academic brilliance, carries the potential to compete with boys in the future. This realization not only brought joy to her face but also sparked contemplation on the limitless possibilities that arise when education transcends gender boundaries."

Waheeda's early experiences were shaped by societal norms that marginalized the educational opportunities available to girls. Growing up with a belief that her education was secondary to that of boys, she accepted this inequality as a standard notion. The prevailing cultural ethos perpetuated gender-based discrimination, reinforcing traditional roles that limited the aspirations of young girls like Waheeda.

Under the guidance of the ISD team, Waheeda underwent a significant transformation in her perception. She now treats her son and daughter with equal regard, recognizing the importance of providing both children with proper education without any gender-based discrimination. Her commitment to gender-neutral education reflects a fundamental shift in her mindset, breaking free from the constraints of traditional expectations.

## OUR TEAM

### Board

Dr. Mohammad Azhar  
Dr. Jayant Kumar  
Ms. Bhasvati Chakravarty  
Dr. Salil Misra

### Delhi

Shruti Chaturvedi : Chief Coordinator  
Chanchal Singh : Programme Incharge  
Surender Singh : Publication Incharge  
Neeraj Sharma : Accounts Incharge / Administrative Head  
Babita Negi : Programme Coordinator  
Shri Krishan : Senior Office Assistant  
Ravneet : Programme Associate  
Talib Akhtar : Programme Associate  
Ranjan Patra : Account Assistant  
Ainie Naqvi : Programme Associate  
Annie Mookerji : Publication and Research Associate  
Shivani Singh : Account Assistant  
Sheraz Mansoor Ahmed : Programme Associate

### Uttar Pradesh

Utpala Shukla : Field Coordinator  
Sarita Bharatiya : Programme Associate  
Nisar Ahmad Khan : Field Coordinator  
Prabha Devi : Programme Associate  
Beenu : Cadre  
Kiran Mishra : Cadre  
Arshad Qureshi : Cadre

### Himachal Pradesh

Tej Singh Thakur : Field Coordinator

### Jharkhand

Goutam Gope : Field Coordinator  
Anita Devi : Programme Associate

### Haryana

Vikram Singh : Cadre

### Jammu & Kashmir

Sadaf : Field Coordinator  
Jawahara Bano : Community Resource Person  
Ulfat Hamid : Community Resource Person  
Pawan Kumar : Field Coordinator  
Gulshan Sharma : Community Resource Person  
Meenu Bala : Community Resource Person  
Vishal Kumar : Community Resource Person

### Uttarakhand

Bimla Karki : Cadre  
Bhawan Singh : Cadre





**INSTITUTE *for* SOCIAL DEMOCRACY**

Flat No. 110, Numberdar House, 62-A, Laxmi Market, Munirka, New Delhi-67

Phone : 091-11-26177904 / Telefax : 091-11-26177904

E-mail : [notowar.isd@gmail.com](mailto:notowar.isd@gmail.com) / Website : [www.isd.net.in](http://www.isd.net.in)

Printing : Sapna Photostat & Ammonia Prints  
DDA Shopping Complex, Munirka, New Delhi-110067