

ACTIVITIES REPORT 2023-24

The Cochin University of Science and Technology created the Women's Studies Centre in 2010 in accordance with the UGC XI plan guidelines for the expansion of women's studies in Indian universities and colleges. The centre has adopted a multidisciplinary approach to the academic engagement with gender and its link with science, technology, engineering, and social sciences in order to support emeritus and post-doctoral research initiatives. The centre has partnered with various government and non-governmental organisations to raise and spread awareness on a range of issues relevant to women, such as safety, entrepreneurship, skill development, legal awareness, technology, health, nutrition, research methodology, well-being, etc. The centre has also carried out research on women from disadvantaged backgrounds, women employed in informal industries, women serving as front-line healthcare providers, and other related subjects. Along with its academic and scientific studies, the centre has been engaging in socially responsible promotional initiatives. The centre has collaborated with NGOs and citizen organisations to offer livelihood support, post-disaster rehabilitation, and disaster aid. By leveraging its unique academic and geographic attributes, the centre hopes to become a leading centre for women's and gender studies study and social action.

The centre has conducted several in-person and online seminars and programmes at the university throughout this time that are beneficial to the mental health and general wellbeing of the faculty, staff, and students.

The major events organized by Women's Studies Center, CUSAT are as follows:

1. In association with the **International Yoga Day**, women studies center organized an interactive session and Demonstration of Injury Prevention Exercises on 21st June 2023, on the topic "**Mind, Body and Wellness**".

The welcome address was done by Dr.Chinchu.C, Post Doctoral Fellow of Women's Studies Center, CUSAT. Felicitation speech was by Dr.K.Ajitha, Director, Women's Studies Center, CUSAT. The interactive session was presented by **Dr.Sidharth J. Unnithan**, Sports medicine specialist. Dr.Sidharth J Unnithan specializes in the prevention and management of sports injuries and optimization of performance in sports professionals through advanced techniques like Biomechanics, Exercise Medicine, Athlete Enhancement, Sports Nutrition, and Sports Psychology. The session addressed the importance of overall wellbeing of body and mind. Students, research scholars and teaching and non-teaching staffs from various departments of the university attended the programme and find it use full to manage their stressful daily work- life routine.

Venue : Hindi Department Auditorium, CUSAT.

2. Women's Studies Centre conducted **Erudite Scholar in Residence** Programme 2023-24 from **18th July to 22nd July 2023**, sponsored by Kerala State Higher Education Council. **Prof.Dr.MadhuraSwaminathan**, Head of Department, Economic Analysis Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Bangalore was the resource person in the programme.

She has a doctorate in Economics from the University of Oxford and has worked on issues of food security, agriculture and rural development for over 25 years. She has authored ten books and numerous publications including *Weakening Welfare: The Public Distribution of Food in India* in 2000 and *How Do Small Farmers Fare? Evidence from Village Studies in India* in 2017. She was a member of the Government of India's High Level Panel on Long Term Food Security and has served on the Committee of Development Policy of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations for the period 2013-2015. More recently, she was a contributing author of the Report on 'Multi-stakeholder Partnerships to Finance and Improve Food Security and Nutrition in the Framework of the 2030 Agenda' by the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), Rome. She is a member of the editorial team of the *Review of Agrarian Studies* since its inception. She is also Chairperson of the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai.

Her lectures and interactions with the audience, which mostly consisted of research scholars and students from different fields, greatly expanded their perspective. The discussion she had was beneficial to the centre as it helped create a future plan for its outreach and academic courses.

3. The interactive session organized by the Women's Studies Centre and Cochin University Women's Welfare Organization (CUWVO) on **World Mental Health Day, October 10th, 2023**, served as a pivotal platform for raising awareness about mental health.

Ms. Anjitha Venugopal, Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam, brought her expertise to the forefront, engaging participants with her insightful presentation and fostering meaningful interactions. Her dedication to the topic and ability to connect with the audience resonated deeply, amplifying the importance of prioritizing mental well-being in daily life. The event attracted a diverse audience, including students, scholars, university staff, and local community members, reflecting the universal relevance of mental health awareness. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees underscored the effectiveness of the program in not only educating but also inspiring individuals to actively engage in conversations about mental wellness and support initiatives aimed at destigmatizing mental health challenges. Through collaborative efforts and engaging discourse, the session left a lasting impact, paving the way for continued advocacy and action in the realm of mental health awareness.

4. The Reproductive Health Awareness class held on January 24th, 2024, was a significant initiative spearheaded by the Women's Studies Centre in collaboration with the Cochin University Women's Welfare Organization (CUWVO). Dr. Akshay V. Prabhu, a distinguished Gynecological Laparoscopic Surgeon from Akshaya Hospital, Kadavanthara, led the session with expertise and empathy. Throughout the class, participants engaged in enlightening discussions covering a wide spectrum of topics crucial to women's health. Dr. Prabhu adeptly addressed the nuanced concerns of adolescent health, shedding light on the importance of early education and access to healthcare services. Moreover, the session delved into the complexities of premarital and marital age group issues, offering invaluable guidance and support to attendees navigating these stages of life. From general gynecological queries to the often-overlooked aspects of premenopause and menopause, every aspect of women's reproductive health was thoughtfully explored, empowering participants with knowledge to make informed decisions and prioritize their well-being. Through collaborative efforts and expert guidance, the event not only raised awareness but also fostered a supportive environment for women to discuss and address their health concerns openly.

5. The invitation extended to the Director of the Women's Studies Centre, accompanied by six girl students under her mentorship, to attend the **All India Students Conference** from **16/02/2024 to 18/02/2024** at **Banaras Hindu University** provided a platform to delve into the significant role of girls in conserving and promoting Indian culture. Divided into two groups, each comprising three students, they participated in the poster presentation segment, showcasing their profound insights into cultural preservation. One group's presentation was on the poster titled "**Ayurveda: The Knowledge Tradition of Kerala**," delving into the rich heritage and healing practices deeply entrenched in Kerala's cultural landscape. Through their meticulous research and presentation, they elucidated the historical evolution, fundamental principles, and contemporary relevance of Ayurveda in fostering holistic health and well-being. By emphasizing Ayurveda's integral role in conserving Indian cultural values, the group underscored the importance of traditional knowledge systems in sustaining cultural identity and promoting societal wellness.

Concurrently, the other group's poster presentation focused on "**A Study on the Ecological Heritage of Kerala: Role of Sacred Groves in Environmental Protection**." Their comprehensive exploration shed light on the significance of sacred groves as crucial ecological sanctuaries vital for biodiversity conservation and environmental stewardship. Through their research, they highlighted the intricate relationship between culture and nature embodied within these sacred spaces, underscoring their role as repositories of traditional ecological knowledge and spiritual reverence. By emphasizing the importance of preserving and nurturing sacred groves, the group articulated the indispensable role of girls in safeguarding Kerala's ecological heritage and promoting sustainable environmental practices rooted in cultural wisdom. Overall, their participation in the conference exemplified their dedication to preserving India's diverse cultural and ecological heritage while also showcasing their intellectual acumen and commitment to societal advancement.

6. The Women's Studies Center organized a two-day **National Seminar** themed "**Investing in 'HER': Unlocking Potential for Empowering Futures**" on March 22nd and 23rd, 2024, adopting a hybrid format at the Hindi Department Auditorium, CUSAT. Timed in conjunction with the observance of International Women's Day on March 8th, the seminar served as a dynamic platform for fostering discourse and action towards women's empowerment. Through a diverse range of presentations, discussions, and interactive sessions, attendees explored multifaceted approaches to investing in women's potential and fostering their empowerment across various spheres of life. From highlighting the importance of education and economic empowerment to addressing societal norms and barriers hindering women's progress, the seminar aimed to catalyze meaningful change and advocate for gender equality. The hybrid format facilitated broader participation, with both in-person and virtual attendees contributing to the rich tapestry of ideas and perspectives shared. By championing the cause of women's empowerment and nurturing a supportive environment for dialogue and collaboration, the seminar left an indelible mark on the journey towards a more inclusive and equitable society.