The 15th edition of the IAWRT Asian Women's Festival was held in partnership with India International Centre (IIC)-New Delhi from 4th to 7th March, 2019.

IAWRT Round Table on #Me Too:

The 15th edition of the IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival began with a Round Table on #Me Too on March 4 at IIC Conference Hall 2. IAWRT Board member, Mausumi Bhattacharyya welcomed everyone to the Round table conceptualised by Paromita Vohra and Nupur Basu and moderated by Nupur and Bina Paul (all three IAWRT board members). The Round Table was an attempt to take stock of the #Me Too campaign in the Indian media and film industry, examine the challenges posed and plan the road ahead. Around 50 women journalists, feminists, writers, activists, internet specialists, academics, filmmakers, and spokespersons of UN Women, FES and Oxfam India and Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) attended the riveting four-hour long brainstorming and addressed the nuances posed by this campaign. Participants had been invited from across India - Assam, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Bundelkhand, Delhi, Goa, Hyderabad, Kohima, Mumbai, Pune, Shillong, Tejpur, Telengana, Thiruvananthapuram – so the experience shared was truly pan India.
The Round Table was framed as a means for women in media but of varied identities, contexts and locations, mindful of those spaces whose #MeToo narratives have not been highlighted in the mainstream - the North-East, rural India, Dalit women and women trying to work with ICCs. It was a first step towards sharing of not just stories but perspectives, with an aim to sustaining an intersectional conversation about how to build on the issues thrown up by #MeToo, in terms of systems, structural change, and re-framing the values promoted through and within media platforms, in feminist terms. It was our hope that people would build new linkages and build on the conversations and relationships that might begin here.

Some of the issues examined at the Round table were: What are the feminist linkages, global to local that #MeToo suggests? What are the emotional undercurrents of #MeToo and how can they inform our politics and organizational practice? What works and isn't working with the ICC? What has reporting on #MeToo revealed about underlying workplace structures and most importantly, the impunity that powerful men enjoy? What sort of chilling effect are criminal defamations having on survivors?

The networking dinner after the Round table allowed the animated discussions to carry on informally. Clearly there was appetite for many such conversations in the coming weeks and months and follow up emails from participants highlighted the unique opportunity to experience solidarity across spaces and learn from each other; as well as how the conversation catalyzed new thinking that they would like to build on together through more such opportunities. We too felt, that an inter-generational, inter-disciplinary and intersectional conversation, which is not only framed in terms of immediate crisis and issue, but rather reflecting on changes needed - is a missing link in the discourse which the Round Table succeeded in providing. We hope to be able to strengthen this initiative in the coming days.

The 15th Asian Women's Film Festival opened from 9.15 am on March 5 at the C D Deshmukh auditorium at the India International Centre (IIC). The excitement was palpable as audiences started pouring in from those early hours. Our first guest at the screening was His Excellency Mr Chung-Kwang Tien, Ambassador of Taiwan. He viewed the film entry from his home country-Taiwan—(Dir: Yu Yu/Daisy) and other films in the morning segment.

Over the next three days the audiences would get to view 51 films from 20 countries – all directed by Asian women directors with the festival theme “Female Gaze”. These included:
- films chosen under general category selected from entries from women filmmakers of Asian origin from across the world
- films selected as part of curated packages
The selection committee for the general programming were IAWRT India members Iffat Fatima, Jerro Mulla and Anandana Kapur along with the Festival Director, Gauri D Chakraborty.

Apart from general programming, the curated themes for the 15th Edition were:
   a) Female Gaze by Bina Paul,
   b) Childhood by Samina Mishra,
   c) Seven Sisters (narratives from Northeast of India) by Supriya Suri,
   d) A Country focus on Georgia curated by Smriti Nevatia.
   e) A special segment on Soundphiles curated by Shikha Jhingan

The country focus for this edition was chosen after due deliberation on the distinct body of work being created by women filmmakers from the Georgian region and whose narratives were gaining attention all over the world in recent years. Georgia as part of the Euro-Asia also shares a lot of cultural sensitivities in terms of space, time, issues and gender discourse and hence the resonance in India was evident.

The festival invited both national and international filmmakers whose films had been selected to participate in the three-day festival. The filmmakers from India who attended were:
   • Asiya Zahoor, (The Stitch)
   • Surbhi Dewan, (Daughter of Nepal)
   • Rishaya Palkiwala, (Roshan and Mani)
   • Roopa Barua, (Daughters of the Polo God)
   • Tribeny Rai, (Chori)
   • Asawari Jagusthe, (The Housemaids)
   • Divya Unny, (Her First Time)
   • Yapangnaro Longkumar, (The River Story)
   • Chandita Mukherjee, Archana Kapoor & Afrah Shafiq, (Displacement and Resilience)

Four international filmmakers participated in the festival:
   • Mari Gulbiani, (Before Father gets back/Georgia)
   • Rusudan Pirveli, (Susa/Georgia)
   • Fatima Shahnaz, (Hope/Sri Lanka)
   • Iris Ben Moshe, (Broken Pipe/Israel)

Screenings were followed by conversations with the filmmakers in person. IAWRT member Reena Mohan seamlessly planned the filmmaker conversations with other IAWRTians - Padmaja Shaw, Jeroo Mulla, Sania Farooqui, Iffat Fatima, Radhika Khanna, Teena Gill, Fowzia Fatima, Aparna Sanyal, Subasri Krishnan, Smriti Nevatia, Samina Mishra, Shikha Jhingan, Bina Paul and others who moderated different segments of filmmaker Q&As and engaged in lively audience interactions.
The film categories included fiction, non-fiction animation, experimental and student films. The films were bunched in thematic segments.

*Day 1: Boundaries, Absence, Re-imagining Red, Inversion and Sisterhood.*
*Day 2: Encoded, Uprooted, Twilight*
*Day 3: Silence, Enquiry & Framed*

While *Boundaries* featured films, which discussed the politics of representation and conflict, *Re-imagining Red*, as its title indicated, looked at different interpretations ranging from war and loss to transgender and identity.

Inclusion of student films along with the work of well-established directors was a key element in the festival. The purpose was to acknowledge the credible work increasingly emerging from younger filmmakers.

The line up on day one was diverse and featured some award winning films like *Peace Carpet* (Iran), *Mamushka* (Israel) and *Perhaps Today* (Lebanon)

Surbhi Dewan, (Dir: *Daughter of Nepal*), a young filmmaker from India engaged in a stimulating post film discussion on the content of disappearance and political identity. Asiya Zahoor (Dir: *The Stitch*) looked at conflict ridden Kashmir through the eyes of a nine year old girl. *Roshan and Mani*, a charming student film, story about two Parsi sisters directed by Rishaya Palkiwala was followed by 'Daughters of the Polo God' from Manipur directed by Roopa Barua. The highlight of this screening was the presence of women polo players from the state. His Excellency Ambassador of Argentina, David Chiburu was also present at the screening.

![Roopa Barua in conversation with Jeroo Mulla](image)

The much-awaited opening ceremony of the festival was held on March 5 evening in the presence of partner institutions and IAWRT members. Festival Director, Gauri Chakraborty shared an insight into the specific highlights and the collaborative nature of this long-standing event that had reached its landmark 15th edition. She highlighted the work by the Festival team to bring the best works of the Asian women film directors from across the world on a single platform.

Nupur Basu, Managing Trustee, IAWRT, chapter India, underlined the vision and commitment of the network of women members of IAWRT both globally and in India in highlighting the work of women in TV, radio, film and media research. She talked about the legacy left behind by the founding member from India, the late Jai Chandiram. Jai had kickstarted the festival 15 years back with Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, Chairperson, IIC-International Research Division, India International Centre. IAWRT felicitated Dr Vatsyayan at the opening ceremony. Nupur also acknowledged the support of partner institutions and the significance of IAWRT in finding synergy with like-minded organisations committed to working for gender equity for women in cinema and media.
Shri N N Vohra, Chairperson, India International Centre (IIC) was invited on stage to light the ceremonial lamp along with Yashodhara Dasgupta, Executive Director, National Foundation of India (NFI), Amitabh Behar, CEO, Oxfam India and Farah Batool, Programme Coordinator, Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan. Other partners like Tech Mahindra, UN Women, Jamia Cooperative Bank and Fredrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) sent their good wishes for the festival.

Shri N N Vohra, in his address, praised both the efforts of IAWRT for the past 15 years in conducting the Asian women's film festival and the value generated in both program and content at these festivals. Shri Vohra congratulated IAWRT for curating the *Little Directors* Workshop and exposing young girl students from poor backgrounds to such creative activity. He was also seen enjoying the *Bioscopewalli* installation in the foyer and asking questions regarding it.

Aparna Sanyal, IAWRT Secretary initiated the conversation with the festival partners and Jashodhara Dasgupta, Amitabh Behar and Farah Batool spoke about the need to support these spaces that IAWRT has created so these conversations on gender could be held around the film festival. Deepika Sharma, IAWRT treasurer welcomed the visiting filmmakers and IAWRT members onto stage for the much awaited group photo taken every edition!
The highlight after the formal opening ceremony was the opening film - a documentary from Georgia, *Before Father Gets Back*, directed by filmmaker Mari Gulbiani. The evocative film explores the lives of two young Muslim girls Imam and Eva, growing up in the rising shadow of Islamic radicalism in the Pankisi valley of Georgia. The film was followed by an interaction between curator of the Georgia segment, Smriti Nevatia and Mari Gulbiani. The engaging discussion with the audience was about the fate of the film's protagonists, the challenges of shooting the documentary, the gains made by Georgian women filmmakers in world cinema and the politics of representation.

Day two began with *Autodriver*, a film from the North East and was followed by other films in the segment *Encoded*. Filmmakers Tribeny Rai (Dir: *Chori*) from Sikkim and Fathima Shanaz (Dir: *Hope*) from Sri Lanka interacted with audiences on the specific content of both their films and their individual experiences in filming them.

The much awaited IAWRT long documentary 2019 production “*Displacement and Resilience*” produced by Chandita Mukherjee was premiered at the festival. Chandita was joined by contributing directors from India, Archana Kapoor and Afrah Shafiq for interaction after the screening.
The festival received an overwhelming response. Most of the screenings were attended by cinephiles, media students, media professionals, academicians, feminists, researchers, IIC members and representatives from various organizations. The major highlights continued to be the active participation of the audience in post film discussions.

A panel discussion on the Female Gaze was held after the screening of the film from Bangladesh—Under Construction by Rubaiyat Hossain, a powerful film about an urbane theatre actress in Bangladesh trying to find her identity not as a traditional wife and mother but through political theatre. The film had been curated under the segment – Female Gaze by Bina Paul and the discussion that followed was moderated by Bina. The panelists included-Jeroo Mulla, Anandana Kapur and Gauri Chakraborty. The discussion engaged with the interpretation of the female gaze and significance of a forum like AWFF, which celebrates the work of women filmmakers. There were lively interactions from the floor about challenges women filmmakers face in their role as directors or producers. Bina Paul talked about the recent challenges and breakthroughs made by the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC) in Kerala. The WCC had become a rallying point for other women filmmakers in the country.

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Day three featured a unique morning segment, *Soundphiles*, which has become a kind of a flagship IAWRT programming—the technical and creative aspects of silence and sound. The curator of the segment Shikha Jhingan and co-directors of one Soundphile segment, Srijaa Kundu and Shrinjita Biswas were present to share their views and perspective with a curious and engaged audience.

The second segment of the day was dominated by the narratives on children and the world through their eyes. *Ziazan* from Turkey was one such film that explored borders as construed by a child in her own circumstances. Director Divya Unny's *Her First Time* based on breaking the silence on menstruation was also part of this segment. Divya took part in an engaging post screening conversation with Sania Farooqui on how films can break social taboos.

*Chuskit*, an award winning film directed by Priya Ramasubban, about a paraplegic girl in Ladakh whose dream is to go to school one day, was another highlight of the Childhood curation. The Childhood package had a fitting finale with a discussion between Samina Mishra and Subasri Krishnan.

The closing film of the festival was the very evocative *Susa* from Georgia. Director Rusudan Pirveli and curator Smriti zeroed in on the impactful narrative once again around a child protagonist. The children centric films had prompted discussions ranged from casting child actors, psychological make-up of child characters to low-budget filmmaking.
Bioscopewaali, the female storyteller

An art installation titled Bioscopewaali was put up by Festival Director, Gauri Chakraborty. This included a life size bioscope titled Indi-e-gaze created with the support of students from Amity School of Communication, Noida and a creative art Installation by design students. Indi-e-gaze, as an installation explored both the 'act of seeing' as in the optical toy or later cinema with the new addition of 'peeping into' gendered texts. The bioscope as a symbolic apparatus of a bygone era, took the viewer back to a pre-cinema experience while the content being watched was that of the female storyteller, whom we referred to as The Bioscopewaali.

"Indi-e-gaze" was appreciated by all who visited the festival. As an innovative concept to re-interpret the act of seeing, the hallmark of cinematic text, the installation was effective in generating dialogue on the cinematic image and significance of content. The videos being played at this installation were provided by Jagori, UN Women & Oxfam.

"Little Directors" workshop

An innovative two-day workshop titled 'Little Directors' was a very significant programme at the festival. The objective of holding the workshop within the festival ambit was to create a visible change in the domain of gender and identity. Forty girls from under-privileged backgrounds between the age group of 12-14 years were invited to undergo a two-day training on filmmaking. The resource persons for the workshop were IAWRT India members, Nina Sabnani and Samina Mishra. The girl students were given a theme of Freedom (Aazadi) around which they had to frame their stories for direction.

The girls were taken through an interactive session on self-expression, as well as a simple way of story telling by their two guides. They were exposed to various images to spark their imagination.
Sameer Ashraf, professional photographer briefed the girls about the technicalities of camera, which helped them to visualize their content better. The little directors were then asked to imagine freely and create their own short film. A young volunteer supported each group. The workshop culminated with the screening of around 8-10 short one minute films made by the little directors. Each participant received a certificate at the end of the workshop.

The girl students had come from the following six institutions: (the descriptions below of the activities are those given by the organisations)

1. **Sahpathi**- a nonprofit education intervention, aimed at providing ongoing academic and extra-curricular support to children from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

2. **Aseem Asha Foundation**- a civil society organization engaged in teaching and promoting innovative uses of print and social media to aid deprived communities and accelerate social development.

3. **Voice of Slum**- a Non-Governmental Organisation run by two Slum-dwellers themselves - Chandni and Dev Pratap Singh. It focuses on bringing children living in slums into mainstream society.

4. **Sarvahitey Foundation**- a non-profit education mediation, keeping in view the fact that a majority of Indian population is devoid of basic needs, and basic infrastructure to self-realize those needs.

5. **Teach For India**- exists precisely to fill the deficit of leadership in education and provide free minds a platform to showcase their talents.

6. **P.S. Govt. School**- The Government School works to provide the underprivileged children with the best platforms to uplift themselves.

(Adolescent girls handling equipment and capturing their ideas)
Our grateful thanks to:

The 15th IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival would not have been possible without the support of our valued partner of 15 years—the India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi.

Our other valued principal partners for this edition of the festival were: National Foundation of India (NFI), Oxfam India, Tech Mahindra Foundation, Goethe Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan, Fredrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), Jamia Cooperative Bank Ltd, UN Women and IAWRT International.

Other support partners were: Georgian National Film Fund (GNFC) who sponsored the air travel of two Georgian filmmakers, the Israel embassy supported the air ticket for travel of one filmmaker from Israel.

Cinestaan and Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR) for helping with media publicity, Change Designers and Kaunsiurge for coming on as gifting partners, Picture Time for providing the film tent for Bioscopewaali, Samir Ashraf, trainer at Sony India for providing cameras and Amity University for volunteers and technical support for Little Directors and Bioscopewaali.

Media coverage:
The festival was widely covered in the media.

1. Mint Lounge, feature called Source
2. Cinestaan:
   Links to all the festival articles that were done by Cinestaan.
3. South Asia Monitor:
4. Metal Magazine:
5. https://www.newsclick.in/my-own-voice -grief-has-no-borders
7. https://www.theweek.in/wire-updates/entertainment/2019/03/05/ent16-festival-women.html
22. https://www.dailypioneer.com/2019/vivacity/her-words-are-her-wings.html#

(Report submitted by Festival Director, Gauri D Chakraborty)