Comprehensive Report of Activities

Women's Studies Centre, Bethune College

Introduction

The Women's Studies Centre at Bethune College, Asia's first women's college established in 1879, serves as a vital platform for gender discourse and activism. Honoring Bethune's pioneering legacy in women's education, the Centre fosters critical engagement with gender issues through an interdisciplinary approach that connects academic inquiry with community action. This report documents the Centre's extensive activities from 1st April 2025 to December 2025, demonstrating a sustained commitment to feminist pedagogy, community engagement, and social transformation.

(Period: 1st April 2025 – 29th August 2026)

April 2025

Cultural Performance for Annual Prize Ceremony (11th April 2025)

- **Performance:** "Sondorboner Dugga"
- **Collaboration:** Cultural Committee and Women's Studies Centre
- **Location:** Bethune College, Kolkata



Focus & Objective: This cultural collaboration celebrated feminine strength and resilience through artistic expression, connecting traditional feminine iconography of Goddess Durga with contemporary feminist discourse. The programme aimed to reclaim and reinterpret religious and cultural traditions from feminist perspectives, demonstrating how traditional symbols of feminine power can inspire contemporary women's empowerment. By showcasing the rich cultural heritage that shapes gender understanding in the regional context, the performance bridged past and present, honoring cultural roots while reimagining them for contemporary feminist purposes.

Seminar on Mental Health and Wellness (26th April 2025)

- **Title:** "Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment: Strategies for Promoting Wellness"
- **Resource Person:** Dr. Susmita Halder, Clinical Psychologist and Associate Professor
- **Collaboration:** Anti-Ragging Cell and IQAC
- **Location:** Bethune College, Kolkata



Focus & Objective: This collaborative event addressed the critical intersection of institutional safety and women's wellbeing, recognizing that gender-responsive environments are fundamental to women's educational access and achievement while promoting a holistic approach to preventing gender-based discrimination and harassment. The seminar aimed to educate the community about mental health challenges that particularly affect women in educational settings, including anxiety, depression, body image issues, and trauma from harassment or discrimination. By collaborating across institutional committees, the programme demonstrated integrated approach to student welfare that recognizes mental health as inseparable from physical safety and social inclusion.

Workshop on Making Hand made Natural Soap (6TH May, 2025)

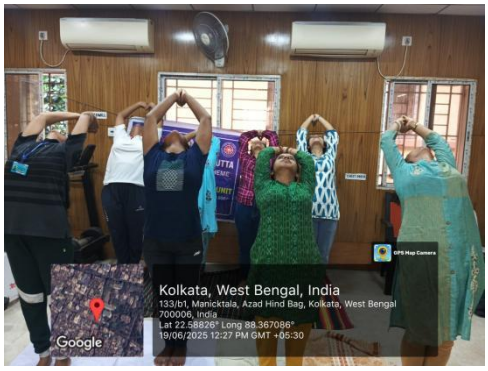
- **Title:** Workshop on Making Hand made Natural Soap
- **Resource Person:** Dr. Tirtha Jyoti Bhaduri, Founder and Director of Mom's Pleasure Handmade Organic Soap
- **Location:** Bethune College, Kolkata



Focus & Objective: A workshop on Making Hand made Natural Soap was conducted on 6th May, 2025 by Womens Studies Centre, Bethune College. Dr. Tirtha Jyoti Bhaduri, Founder and Director of Mom's Pleasure Handmade Organic Soap was the resource person.This hands-on workshop was conducted to empower participants with sustainable self-care skills and entrepreneurial knowledge.

International Day of Yoga (19th June 2025)

- **Collaboration:** NSS unit and Women's Studies Centre
- **Participants:** Students, Dr. Rakhi Paul and Dr. Gopa Bhaumik from Physics Department
- **Activities:** 12 asanas of Suryanamaskar accompanied by mantras; demonstration of five key asanas (Tadasana, Vrikshasana, Bhujangasana, Ardhahalasana, and Naukasana)
- **Location:** Bethune College, Kolkata



Focus & Objective: This initiative aimed to promote physical and mental wellness among students, recognizing yoga as an essential practice for women's health and empowerment. The programme addressed holistic health by integrating physical exercise with mindfulness practices, acknowledging that women's wellbeing requires attention to both body and mind. By emphasizing yoga specifically for women, the initiative recognized women's particular health needs and the importance of stress management, flexibility, and strength-building. The inclusion of mantras connected physical practice with spiritual dimensions, offering students tools for comprehensive self-care that can support resilience in face of gendered stresses and pressures.

July 2025

Support for Formerly Incarcerated Women (30th July 2025)

- **Collaboration:** Abhinna (local NGO)
- **Target Group:** Formerly incarcerated women
- **Activities:** Support for women learning to make pizzas and cookies; staff members purchased food items



Focus & Objective: This initiative focused on supporting women from correctional facilities as part of their reintegration process, recognizing that formerly incarcerated women face enormous barriers to social acceptance and economic opportunity. The programme aimed to provide both economic assistance and encouragement by creating a market for products made by these women, offering dignity to those working toward self-sufficiency while

challenging societal stigma against formerly incarcerated individuals. The Women's Studies Centre's involvement reflected its commitment to connecting marginalized women to mainstream society through inclusive economic opportunities, providing practical skills, financial independence, and renewed confidence to women often excluded from rehabilitation and social acceptance. By actively purchasing and promoting their products, the college community demonstrated solidarity and recognition of these women's humanity and potential beyond their legal histories.

August 2025

Raksha Bandhan: Women in Solidarity (8th August 2025)

- **Duration:** 1 day
- **Components:**
    - Teachers visited Burtolla Police Station to tie rakhis to police personnel of all genders
    - Teachers and students exchanged rakhis within college campus
    - Community outreach with students tying rakhis to people across gender lines and children from underprivileged backgrounds
- **Target Audience:** Police personnel, college community, underprivileged children





Focus & Objective: This initiative transcended traditional boundaries and promoted women's solidarity by reimagining Raksha Bandhan as a celebration of mutual respect and community protection rather than patriarchal gender roles. The programme aimed to acknowledge and honor the police force's commitment to public safety and their essential role in safeguarding citizens, particularly women's security. By extending the festival beyond traditional brother-sister relationships, the initiative challenged gender norms while building collaborative relationships between educational institutions and law enforcement. The exchange of rakhis among women strengthened bonds and sisterhood within the college community, while outreach to underprivileged children demonstrated commitment to breaking class barriers. This comprehensive approach emphasized inclusivity, community engagement, and empowerment through shared cultural traditions, fostering

solidarity among women across different social strata while promoting mutual respect and breaking gender barriers.

Planting Saplings Initiative (12th August 2025)

Title: "Seeds of Change"- Planting Saplings Initiative

Location: Burtolla Police Station



Objective: On Bethune day,12th August,2025, members of Women's Studies Centre, Bethune College, visited Burtolla Police Station to plant saplings and officers from the Burtolla Police Station had visited our college campus for the same, emphasizing the connection between women and environmental preservation. This eco-feminist initiative demonstrates community engagement through environmental preservation while highlighting women's role in sustainability. The programme empowered participants by connecting gender equality with ecological responsibility,fostering inclusive environmental consciousness that bridges institutional and community spaces.

September 2025

Sundarban Field Visit (7th September 2025)

- **Location:** Baikunthapur and Mundapara, Sundarbans
- **Participants:** Dr. Nilanjana Bagchi (Director, WSC) and Prof. Sumita Mukhopadhyay (Member, WSC)
- **Observations:** 38 tiger appearances recorded in three months; women engaging in crab hunting and fishing; alternative livelihoods through pickle-making



Focus & Objective: This exploratory field visit aimed to study the socio-economic conditions of marginalized communities, particularly "tiger widows"—women who have lost their husbands to tiger attacks. The research-oriented initiative sought to understand how women in environmentally vulnerable regions are challenging traditional gender

roles by taking up professions like crab hunting and fishing, previously dominated by men, and creating alternative livelihoods through entrepreneurial activities. A critical dimension emerged during interactions: despite tragic losses to tigers, these women expressed no anger toward the animals, raising important questions about learned helplessness and possible surrender to patriarchal acceptance of fate. The WSC identified significant potential for research in understanding these psychological and sociological dimensions—whether this acceptance represents resilience, conditioning, or a complex interplay of environmental determinism and gendered vulnerability. This study aimed to identify training needs and develop intervention programmes to empower these resilient women who have transformed tragic circumstances into opportunities for economic independence, while also examining the complex intersections of caste oppression, environmental challenges, and patriarchal structures in tribal communities.

Saree Mela (19th September 2025)

- **Collaboration:** NSS, Bethune College
- **Location:** Goabagan area, Kolkata
- **Timing:** Pre-Durga Puja
- **Target Group:** Women from marginalized communities



Focus & Objective: This saree distribution event focused on dignified giving and community support, ensuring women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds could participate in festive celebrations with dignity. The programme reflected WSC's commitment to economic empowerment and social inclusion of underprivileged women through culturally significant gestures. By distributing sarees before Durga Puja—a major cultural festival—the initiative ensured that marginalized women could participate in community celebrations without shame or exclusion due to economic constraints. The emphasis on "dignified giving" challenged charity models that demean recipients, instead framing the distribution as solidarity and recognition of shared humanity. The programme demonstrated understanding that cultural participation is not a luxury but a fundamental aspect of social inclusion and self-respect.

November 2025

Community Outreach to Sonagachi (4th November 2025)

- **Collaboration:** NSS unit and Women's Studies Centre
- **Location:** Sonagachi (A prominent red-light area in Kolkata)
- **Target Group:** 30 children residing in Sonagachi

- **Activities:** Distribution of school bags and educational materials



Focus & Objective: This community outreach programme demonstrated WSC's holistic approach to women's empowerment by supporting the education of children in marginalized communities, recognizing that breaking cycles of poverty and vulnerability requires investment in the next generation. The initiative reflected WSC's commitment to addressing the intersectional challenges faced by women and children in stigmatized communities through direct intervention and support. By specifically targeting children in Sonagachi—an area known for sex work—the programme challenged stigma and demonstrated that all children deserve educational opportunities regardless of their parents' occupation or social status. The distribution of school bags and materials provided practical support while symbolically affirming these children's right to education and dignified futures. The programme embodied feminist understanding that women's empowerment must include ensuring better opportunities for the next generation, particularly children who face compounded marginalization.

December 2025

Sensitization Programme on Sexual Harassment (5th December 2025)

- **Collaboration:** Internal Committee, IQAC, Women's Studies Centre, and Gender Sensitization Cell
- **Location:** Bethune College, Kolkata
- **Resource Persons:** Dr. Mononita Kundu Das (St. Xavier's University) and Dr. Subarna Mondal (Sanskrit College and University)
- **Topic:** "Creating a Culture of Consent and Respect"



Focus & Objective: This critical awareness programme, coordinated by WSC, addressed systemic gender-based violence while promoting empowerment through knowledge and legal literacy. The initiative emphasized inclusion by ensuring all community members understand their role in creating harassment-free environments and supporting survivors, reflecting WSC's commitment to institutional transformation and the creation of safe spaces for women. The programme aimed to shift institutional culture from reactive complaint-handling to proactive prevention through education about consent, respect, and appropriate conduct. By bringing together multiple institutional bodies (Internal Committee, IQAC, Gender Sensitization Cell), the initiative demonstrated comprehensive institutional

commitment to addressing sexual harassment at all levels. The focus on creating a "culture of consent and respect" emphasized that preventing harassment requires changing attitudes, behaviors, and institutional norms, not merely implementing policies. The programme equipped participants with understanding of what constitutes harassment, bystander intervention strategies, and the importance of believing and supporting survivors.

March 2026

Poster Competition (6th March 2026)

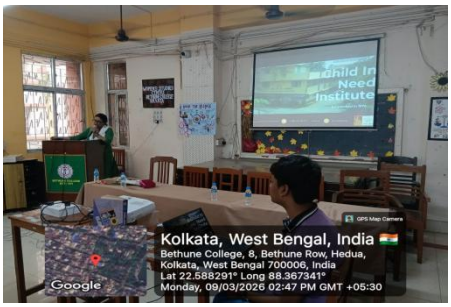
- **Collaboration:** Students Activity Cell
- **Location:** Bethune College, Kolkata
- **Theme:** "Breaking Barriers"



Focus & Objective: The Women's Studies Centre of Bethune College, in collaboration with the Student's Activity Cell of the College, organised a poster competition on the theme "Breaking Barriers". The objective of the competition was to encourage students to creatively reflect on the social, cultural, economic and gender-based barriers that restrict individuals, particularly women and marginalised communities. It aimed to promote awareness about equality,inclusion, empowerment and the need to challenge discriminatory practices through creative expression.Our students participated enthusiastically and presented thought- provoking posters which demonstrated their awareness of contemporary social concerns. The competition provided a meaningful platform for students to engage with questions of equality and social justice through art. It successfully fostered critical thinking, creativity and sensitivity towards the barriers faced by different sections of society.The programme concluded with appreciation for the participatns and recognition of the efforts of the students who contributed to making the event meaningful and engaging.

Awareness Programme on Gender, Sex and Sexuality (9h March 2026)

- **Collaboration:** Department of Women's Studies and Child in Need Institute
- **Location:** Bethune College, Kolkata
- **Theme:** Gender, Sex and Sexuality



Focus & Objective: The Women's Studies Centre of Bethune College, in collaboration with the Department of Women's Studies of the college and Child in Need Institute (CINI), organised an awareness programme on "Gender, Sex and Sexuality" on 9th March 2026. The programme aimed to create awareness among students about the concepts of Gender, Sex and Sexuality and to encourage a better understanding of gender identities, gender roles, stereotypes and sexual diversity.The session provided an opportunity for the participants to engage in meaningful discussions and clarify their understanding of these important issues. The programme highlighted the significance of promoting gender sensitivity, respect, equality and inclusivity in society. The interactive nature of the programme encouraged students to participate actively and reflect on the ways in which social norms and stereotypes influence individual lives and relationships. The programme concluded with a messege emphasising the importance of creating a more inclusive and gender-sensitive society through awareness, education and dialogue.

April 2026

Health Camp for the Women and Children of Sonagachi (11h April 2026)

- **Collaboration:** Bethune College NSS unit, Amra Padatik and Hindol Welfare Society
- **Location:** Sonagachi, a prominent red light area in Kolkata
- **Theme:** Gender, Sex and Sexuality
- **Target Group:** Women and Children of Sonagachi



Focus & Objective: In collaboration with the NSS Unit of Bethune College, the Women's Studies Centre of Bethune College, along with Amra Padatik and Hindol Welfare Society, organised a health camp on 11th April, 2026 at Sonagachi, a prominent red-light area of Kolkata, for the women and children of the community.The camp focused on both physical and mental health, recognising the need for holistic healthcare among the community members. Health related concerns were addressed and participants were made aware of the importance of regular health check-ups, personal well-being and preventive health care. Equal emphasis was placed on mental health, highlighting the importance of emotional well-being and creating awareness about the psychological challenges faced by women and children in vulnerable circumstances. The programme was a meaningful initiative towards promoting accessible and inclusive healthcare. It

also reflected the collective commitment of the participating organisations to create greater awareness about health, dignity and well-being among marginalised communities.

May 2026

Poster Display: Say No to Dowry: Raising Awareness and Breaking the Silence (11th May, 2026)

- **Collaboration:** Gender Sensitization Cell of Bethune College
- **Location:** Bethune College, Kolkata
- **Theme:** Dowry



Focus & Objective: The Women's Studies Centre of Bethune College, in collaboration with the Gender Sensitization Cell, organised a poster display on "Say No to Dowry" on 11th May 2026 at Bethune College The programme was organized with the objective of creating awareness about the harmful social practice of dowry and encouraging students to speak out against it. The posters displayed powerful messages highlighting the social, economic and gender-based consequenses of dowry. The activity encouraged students to reflect on the importance of gender equality, dignity and respect inmarriage. It also emphasized the need for collective efforts to challenge and eliminate the practice of dowry from society. The poster display successfully created awareness among the students and reinforced the messege that marriage should be based on equality and mutual respect, not on dowry or material demands.

Prize Distribution Ceremony for Women's Day Competition (19th May, 2026)

- **Collaboration:** Students Activity Cell
- **Location:** Bethune College, Kolkata



Focus & Objective: The Women's Studies Centre of Bethune College, in collaboration with the Students Activity Cell, organised a Prize Distribution Ceremony on 19th May 2026. The ceremony was held to felicitate the students who participated in the Poster Competition and Photography competition orgaised as part of the Women's Day celebration.The event

recognised and appriciated the student's creativity, enthusiasm and active participation in the celebration of Women's Day.

August 2026

Raksha Bandhan Celebration (29th August, 2026)

- **Collaboration:** The Retreat Old Age Home & College campus
- **Location:** Salt Lake, Kolkata and Bethune College



Focus & Objective: On 29th August 2026, the Womens Study Centre of Bethune College organised a cultural event at 'The Retreat' , an old age home , to celebrate the spirit of Raksha Bandhan. The programme aimed to foster a sense of solidarity, companionship and togetherness among the students, teachers and the elderly residents. Students and teachers of our college had participated in this programme enthusiastically by tying rakhis to the residents as a gesture of affection, respect and solidarity. This was followed by a short cultural programme presented by the students, which created a warm and joyful atmosphere and made the occasion memorable for everyone. On the same day, Raksha Bandhan was also celebrated on the college campus. Faculty members and students came together to exchange good wishes and celebrate the values of unity , togetherness and mutual care. The celebration sought to move beyond the conventional understanding of Raksha Bandhan as a ritual centred on the protection of women by men. Instead it highlighted reciprocity, equality, care and solidarity among the individuals irrespective of gender or age. By connecting students with the elderly residents , the programme emphasised the importance of recognising care as a shared social responsibility and valuing the experiences and dignity of older persons. The celebration thus reaffirmed the feminist ideals of equality, inclusivity, mutual respect and collective solidarity, transforming the traditional festival into an occasion for building more caring and egalitarian social relationships.