

# Soma Wadhwa

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## Research Interests

Soma is interested in issues of Education and Gender. She uses qualitative methodologies to understand the processes through which development interventions impact outcomes — the theories of change. Her focus has been participatory research methods, in conjunction with case studies, comparative ethnographies and plain storytelling as a narrative tool.

## Educational Qualifications

- MA English Literature, St Stephen's College, Delhi University
- BA (Hons) English, St Stephen's College, Delhi University
- ICSE, The Frank Anthony Public School

## Work Experience

- **Fellow, India Development Foundation (October 2010 — till date)**
  - Concurrent monitoring and evaluation of Disha, a programme aimed at the economic empowerment of million women across five Indian states: I am the lead for Tracking Studies and Process Mapping for this UNDP-implemented programme (2015 and 2018). My reports and recommendations are to be inputs for mid-course corrections of programmatic design and implementation, as also blueprints for scalability and policy briefs.
  - Evaluation of Tara Akshar+, an adult literacy programme for women in Uttar Pradesh (UP): I was the qualitative research lead for this IKEA Foundation funded programme in three districts of UP. I collected primary qualitative data, then worked with econometricians to use sequential mixed methodology to understand the programme's impact on its participants in terms of learning, retention and women's autonomy.
  - *Evaluations of development interventions funded by The Netherlands government*: I evaluated 10 Dutch-government-funded civil society organisations in nine Indian states for their network strengths over two years (2012-2014). I collaborated with, and attended two workshops at, the University of Wageningen, Netherlands for this project.
  - *Odisha Girls Incentive Programme for Secondary Education*: I was in-charge of qualitative research for this Odisha government and UK-DFID programme to provide cash transfers to girls in Rayagada to ensure secondary school attendance. I designed Knowledge Attitude Practice surveys, conducted interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), documented case studies to analyse the feasibility of schemes aiming to incentivise education.
  - *Swaayam programme for women's empowerment in Uttar Pradesh*: I was lead qualitative evaluator for this IKEA Foundation-UNDP programme that aimed to empower women by forming SHGs. I used participatory research methods to collect data and analysed it for strengths and weaknesses in programme design, implementation and monitoring.

- *Madhya Pradesh Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) to farmer households in Indore district*: I designed the sampling strategy and implemented a series of FGDs to document the impacts of this UNICEF-funded programme and recommend policy on UCTs.
- *Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Conditional Cash Transfer*: I collected data towards analysing people's preferences, if any, for the public distribution system over cash transfers.
- *Independent research*: I have authored two academic papers, and am working on my third. For the first I followed four adolescent girls in Odisha's Rayagada district between 2012 and 2014 to see how a cash transfer conditional on attending secondary school affected them. My findings and their policy implications have been published this year in the *Journal of Development Practice and Policy*, SAGE. My second paper on the impact of an adult literacy programme for women in Uttar Pradesh is forthcoming in the *Journal of South Asia Development*, SAGE. I am working on my third paper 'Linking literacy and mobile phone usage among women: Evidence from a women's adult literacy programme in India'. It has been presented at an invited talk in IIM-Bangalore (15 November, 2017) and at IIM-Ahmedabad (February 16, 2018). Technology, women and Inclusion is, in fact, a research theme that I am focusing on presently
- *Teaching*: I have lectured PhD students and bureaucrats on qualitative methodologies at the V V Giri National Institute of Labour twice in 2017. I conducted two impact evaluation workshops for development professionals at the Indian School of Development Management (ISDM) in 2017. I lectured post graduate students in Development Leadership at ISDM on Impact Evaluations: Qualitative Methodologies in February 2018.
- **Deputy Editor, *Open*, Newsweekly Magazine (December 2008 — September 2010)**  
As a core member of the launch team, I was part of the magazine's editorial and visual philosophy. I was in-charge of its weekly publishing cycle; I decided the weekly news menu, ideating with reporters on stories and then guiding and monitoring their efforts, visualising stories with the photographers and designers, planning and working on stories that were not time-bound, and setting deadlines.
- **Editor, *HT on Saturday*, *The Hindustan Times* (2006 — 2008)**  
As Saturday Editor, I was in-charge of HT's Saturday editions — from front page to the last sports page. The edition included weekend feature pages, and was mandated to have special front page news stories. I planned features and stories, assigned and monitored them. I led the production. The regular editorial staff and a separate Saturday team reported to me.
- **Deputy Editor, *The Indian Express* (2005 — 2006)**  
In-charge of the Op-Ed page, I had to keep pace with news and generate daily opinion. This included selecting from among unsolicited articles, identifying writers and experts who could best react to the day's news and commissioning them to write. I edited the articles. I also wrote edits, opinion pieces and special news pieces.
- **Features Editor, *Outlook* (1995 — 2005)**  
I joined *Outlook* as Principal Correspondent and was Features Editor at the time of leaving. Apart from leading the magazine's team of feature writers in Delhi, as well as in all its state

bureaux, I reported and wrote extensively on issues of development. My main emphasis was on issues of education, gender and public health. I also wrote on minorities and social trends. For this I travelled extensively through the country. (My cover letter mentions some of my stories.) I also reported on issues of my focus from outside India. I recounted the stories of minor Nepali girls from Kathmandu, where they had been dumped back after being trafficked into Indian brothels and contracting HIV. From Halifax, UK, I reported on the Mirpuri Muslims hiring bounty hunters to track and extract women from the community who eloped with white men. I covered HIV-AIDS conferences as a media delegate in Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Melbourne.

- **Senior Features Writer, *The Times of India* (1995, seven months)**

I reported and wrote features on issues of Education, Health and Gender. I also did front-page stories on these issues.

- **Senior Reporter, *The Pioneer* (1992 — 1995)**

I was a daily reporter with Education and Gender as her beats.

- **Reporter, *The Sunday Observer* (1991 — 1992)**

### Achievements

- Recipient of The Sanskriti Award for Journalism
- Winner of the Press Council of India Award for reporting on Education
- British High Commission Chevening Scholar
- Worked at the Education Desk with *The Guardian* in London
- Recipient of the Shri Ram Award for Excellence in Academics. Tuition waiver and stipend through graduating years at St. Stephen's College

### Academic papers

- Why some girls drop out of secondary school despite conditional cash transfers: A mixed method analysis  
Sambit Rath and Soma Wadhwa, *Journal of Development Policy and Practice*, SAGE  
<http://journals.sagepub.com/eprint/guY2zzn255GAP7NuZJVa/full>
- Impact of an Adult Literacy Programme on the Personal and Public Lives of Women: Evidence from India  
Nishant Chadha and Soma Wadhwa, *Journal of South Asia Development*, SAGE (Forthcoming)  
Presented the paper at a conference on Gender in the Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad (March 5, 2018).
- Linking literacy and mobile phone usage among women: Evidence from a women's adult literacy programme in India  
Nishant Chadha and Soma Wadhwa (Working paper)  
Presented the paper at IIM-Bangalore (15 November, 2017) and IIM-Ahmedabad (February 16, 2018).

## Some work

- *Outlook*
  - <https://www.outlookindia.com/gsearch?cx=partner-pub-8484176841147392%3A5546753431&cof=FORID%3A11&q=soma+wadhwa>
  - <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/the-brown-bounty-hunter/203873>
  - <https://outlookindia.com/magazine/story/for-sale-childhood/205123>
  - <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/and-he-can-keep-it/224458>
  - <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/pencil-erasure/223093>
  - <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/quotindia-has-been-over-cautious-with-regard-to-china-and-tibetquot/204621>
- *The Indian Express*
  - <http://archive.indianexpress.com/columnist/somawadhwa/>
- *Open*
  - <http://www.openthemagazine.com/search?keys=soma%20wadhwa>
- *The Hindustan Times*
  - <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/the-village-buys-a-slice-of-urban-life/story-c1LVpMwVcff4DY1JNo4TDI.html>
  - <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/women-burn-bright-in-rajasthan-s-sati-village/story-22jgvauebAxAzDoGW7oCcO.html>
- *The Little Magazine*
  - <http://www.littlemag.com/belonging/printmag.html>