

  
 Youth  
**VIKALP**  
 sangam

NOV 27 - DEC 05 | 2020



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# Introduction

The name 'Vikalp Sangam' is Hindi for 'Alternatives Confluence'. As the world hurtles towards greater ecological devastation, inequalities, and social conflicts, the biggest question facing us is: are there alternative ways of meeting human needs and aspirations, without trashing the earth and without leaving half of humanity behind? Across India (as in the rest of the world), this question is being answered by a multitude of grassroots and policy initiatives: from meeting basic needs in ecologically sensitive ways to decentralised governance and producer-consumer movements, from rethinking urban and rural spaces towards sustainability to struggles for social and economic equity.

Vikalp Sangam is a space for individuals and initiatives to come together and engage on these subjects and topics that helps to journey towards a more just future. It is a space to share, dialogue, discuss, learn from each other and more; build friendships and solidarity. Youth Vikalp Sangam is particularly designed for youth in alternatives. The biggest hope we see in the country today is that more and more youth (many who are college and school students) are questioning old ways of being and doing, networking to advocate for change and using diverse means of expression to bring about change. This was the third Youth Vikalp Sangam that was being organized, the first was held in Bhopal in 2017, and the second one was held in Bengaluru in 2019.

The preparations for this particular Sangam had begun in September 2019. Multiple locations were in consideration, and we decided to host the Sangam in Mumbai in June 2020 and began preparations. But as the COVID-19 pandemic spread and lockdown imposed in March 2020, the physical gathering seemed impossible. We decided to take the Sangam online in August, and our small team of organisers kept meeting regularly ever since, redesigning the Sangam for an online space.

The Youth Vikalp Sangam was thus hosted as a 5 day programme between November 27 to December 05, with 27 participants from different parts of the country attending. The participants were into diverse areas of work within the broad umbrella of 'Ecology', such as afforestation, organic farming, waste management, raising environmental awareness, tribal rights, river documentation, etc. The Sangam timing was consciously kept for 2 hours per day over 5 days, factoring in the internet fatigue most people would have had. Other sessions on varied themes were also offered by the participants and organisers outside the Sangam hours between November 27th and December 05th, thus making it a collectively owned, co-created space.

On Day 1 of the sangam, context was set for collective visioning and the participants interacted with each other and learned about each other's work. The group delved into more thematic discussions on the following days.

# Schedule

<b>Day 1</b> Nov 27, Fri	<b>Introduction &amp; Context Setting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting to know each other and sharing about one's work</li> <li>• Setting the context for collective visioning</li> </ul>
<b>Day 2</b> Nov 28, Sat	<b>Visioning Alternatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator: Ashish Kothari (Kalpavriksh, Vikalp Sangam)</li> <li>• Understanding the Alternatives Framework</li> <li>• Discussion on spheres of transformation and core values</li> </ul>
<b>Day 3</b> Nov 30, Mon	<b>Sustainable Livelihoods &amp; Resilience</b>	<p>Dialogue on new challenges and questions brought up by COVID-19 through parallel sessions lead by facilitators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable livelihoods &amp; building resilience</li> </ul> <p>- Ananthoo (Tula &amp; Organic Farmers Market)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different forms of Capital that can build sustainability</li> </ul> <p>- Gijs Spoor (Auroville)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gendered stories of resilience &amp; sustainable livelihoods</li> </ul> <p>- Seno Tsehah (North-East Network)</p>
<b>Day 4</b> Dec 2, Wed	<b>Sustaining Movements &amp; Building Synergies</b>	<p>Panel discussion exploring learnings from various movements, followed by interaction with participants featuring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jiten Yumnam (Centre for Research and Advocacy, Manipur)</li> <li>• Tara Krishnaswamy (Shakti, Citizens for Bengaluru)</li> <li>• Sharanya Nayak (Tribal &amp; Dalit rights movements)</li> <li>• Kapil Shah (ASHA-Kisan Swaraj network, Jatan Trust)</li> </ul> <p>Moderator: Ashish Kothari</p>
<b>Day 5</b> Dec 5, Sat	<b>Collaborations &amp; Closing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating space for collective proposals and collaborations</li> <li>• Reflections and way forward</li> </ul>



Vikalp Sangam: Doodle by Ashish Kothari

# Visioning Alternatives

On Day 2 of the sangam, we looked into the flower of transformation that has emerged out of the Vikalp Sangam processes that would enable us to vision alternatives. The session was facilitated by Ashish Kothari.

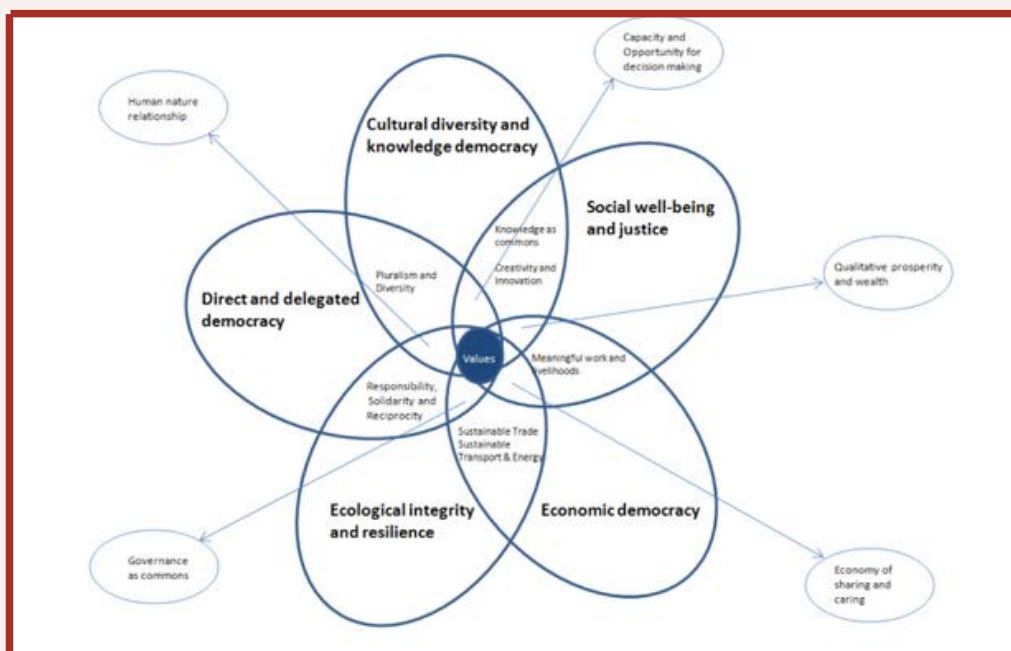
**Ashish Kothari** | [ashishkothari@riseup.net](mailto:ashishkothari@riseup.net)

Ashish is the founder-member of Kalpavriksh and member of many people's movements. He taught at Indian Institute of Public Administration; coordinated India's National Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plan, served on boards of Greenpeace International & India, ICCA Consortium. He helps coordinate Vikalp Sangam ([www.vikalpsangam.org](http://www.vikalpsangam.org)), Global Tapestry of Alternatives ([www.globaltapestryofalternatives.org](http://www.globaltapestryofalternatives.org)), & Radical Ecological Democracy ([www.radicalecologicaldemocracy.org](http://www.radicalecologicaldemocracy.org)) and is the co-author/co-editor of *Churning the Earth*, *Alternative Futures: India Unshackled*, and *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*.



Ashish shared about the two ways of looking into the journey of alternatives, one which is about 'Resistance', and the other about 'Human Needs'. He talked about how important it is to understand and challenge not just the symptoms of the problems, but go deeper and look at the structures and forces which create them in the first place. The understanding of the concentration of power in the hands of a few - private corporations, nation states, etc. - and the structural violence - casteism, racism, men dominating women, human beings dominating nature, etc. - brings us to resist capitalism, state domination, patriarchy and human-centeredness, and help us move towards other ways of being, knowing, doing and dreaming. And then there are alternatives addressing human needs, those intended for the well-being of the planet. The action is to understand, be involved with and document initiatives from all across India and the world, and also to create alternatives that don't create the problems the dominant structures have caused.

As far as an alternative is concerned, the transformation that is taking place in and through them has to depict at least two of these spheres.



## Direct and Delegated Democracy

- Radical democracy wherein the power lies with the people, not to dominate others, but to be responsible about it.
- Power that is decentralised and nested in decision making.
- Delegated and representative democracy wherein mechanisms of accountability, robust forms of accountability, make sure of the responsiveness, make sure power doesn't get centred and it remains at the grassroots.
- Ecoregional planning across states and countries, wherein political units are aligned with ecological and cultural ones. Governing biocultural regions as a whole - gangetic plains, western ghats, etc. - can lead to ecologically sensitive decisions.

## Economic Democracy

- Moving economics away from its domination of our lives, its current neglect of ecological limits, and the commodification and commercialisation of everything in our lives.
- To look at economics as a part of ecology, since both arise from the same word oikos which means home.
- Looking at economic self-sufficiency or swaraj, rather than globalisation which makes us dependent on a distant system, a system that collapses when something like COVID happens.

## Social Well-being and Justice

- Equity amongst classes, castes, genders, ethnic groups, species, 'able'ities

## Cultural Diversity and Knowledge Democracy

- Information in the Commons
- Respecting inclusive diversity - languages, cuisines, knowledges
- Decolonising
- Democratic research and development, science and technology

## Ecological Integrity and Resilience

- Renewed relationship with rest of nature
- Seeing humans as part of nature
- Behave in a way that respects the rest of Nature - rights of species, rivers, mountains

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Recommended reading:

The Search for Radical Alternatives: Key Elements and Principles: <https://kalpavriksh.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/AlternativesframeworkbookletPawaniAnjitha.pdf>

An activity on 'Visioning Alternatives' was then conducted. The group was divided into multiple smaller breakout groups where the participants discussed which of these spheres their major involvement was in, in terms of their work. They also discussed how they intended to take it forward and the other spheres they wanted to expand their work to, after which they shared the highlights of the discussion back in the main group and their reflections from them.

## Reflections on Visioning Alternatives

- Better dialogues, also for dialogues to even happen
- Establishing the value system
- Collaboration: network such that the weaknesses we have are met by working with other groups
- To be more sensitive to the articulation voice and agency of the voices of the most marginalised sections themselves and enable people to speak for themselves
- Maximise non-monetary, non-commodified, non-commercial ways of working
- Bring back relationships of caring and sharing into our own movements
- Create dignified livelihoods
- Communicate to the heart and not the head
- Retain traditional practices and knowledge systems
- Value the process as much as the content
- Gender equality in all spaces

We also reflected on the disadvantages and opportunities of the current generation when it comes to envisioning alternative futures.

- There is no luxury of messaging in a simplistic manner, "One shouldn't cut trees", for example. Articulation has to be much more nuanced. But the opportunity is to build more collaborations and do constructive work if we get the nuances right.
- The levels of distraction are higher, with 6 different social media to respond to. At the same time, there is the opportunity to reach out to more people.
- The superficiality of what we are reading and what we receive on our timeline is a challenge. The small sized and dumped down content is dumping ourselves down as well. In this context, there is a need for slow media, slow messaging and slow journalism.

## Sustainable Livelihoods & Resilience

On Day 3 of the sangam, we looked at sustainability of livelihoods and the need to build resilience, given that COVID-19 had opened up many vulnerabilities around livelihoods and sustenance. We had three speakers, Ananthoo, Gijs Spoor and Seno Tshah, who had varied experiences in this area, sharing their insights. Ananthoo spoke of 'Sustainable Livelihoods & Building Resilience' in the context of reimagining enterprises. Gijs conducted an activity on 'Different Forms of Capital that can build Sustainability'. Seno spoke on 'Gendered Stories of Resilience and Sustainable Livelihoods' from her experience of working with women in North East India. The sessions were conducted in three different breakout groups at the same time, and the participants chose the session they wanted to participate in.

**Ananthoo** | [organicananthoo@gmail.com](mailto:organicananthoo@gmail.com)

Ananthoo is (was?) a Telecom Engineer by profession and worked in the Telecom and IT sector. Since 2006, after coming back to India from Europe (his last stint was 6 years in Switzerland), he has been working only on social causes, predominantly on safe Food and sustainable agriculture. He does not work on any monetarily gainful employment anymore. Ananthoo works with small and marginal farmers, along with a few friends, helping them move to sustainable farming and run a not-for-profit organic retail outlet in Chennai - reStore ([www.restore.org.in](http://www.restore.org.in)).



As an extension of this and to take safe organic food to more people especially the middle class. Together, they started OFM- Organic Farmers Market (<http://www.ofmtn.in/>). OFM is a collective through which they work with many organic farmers on the one side and youngsters interested to take the movement and organic markets on the other side. They have also been working with cotton farmers to help them grow desi cotton organically, which they then procure. This is then hand spun, hand woven, naturally dyed, and manually stitched. They sell the garments and plough the margins back into these livelihoods: (See [tula.org.in](http://tula.org.in) and [facebook.com/tulaIndia](https://facebook.com/tulaIndia)). In essence, he is involved in various experiments of social enterprises that are sustainable - ecologically and economically, such as the India HandMade Collective (<https://indiahandmadecollective.com/>)

"There is a need to reimagine enterprises in the alternatives, because anything that we do will be in the purview of capitalism, and thereby be countered by it. The answer to the crisis we see today is in having small enterprises, decentralised operations, local economy, etc., but it is not an easy path, given where we are right now. And the inequalities aggravated by pandemic makes it even more challenging. Therefore, we have to think about Sustainability in both ecological and economic terms, or else we will become irrelevant very soon. There are multiple aspects to be considered, whichever area that we choose to work on. Take the case of cotton, for example. **98% of cotton grown in India today is genetically modified.** So that is definitely one area to start with, by encouraging the use of traditional and indigenous varieties of cotton. But just that is not enough. It is to be understood that there is no level playing field when it comes to addressing the crisis. So we should be creating an enterprise with heart in it, in the entire value chain and processes involved, thereby attracting more people to it and making it meaningful. This way, we can create an alternative economy.

The answer is in creating a distributed economy, like Gandhi and Kumarappa talked about. Take the case of hand spinning against an industrialised spinning mill. An industrialized mill not only displaces people out of their jobs, it consumes a lot of resources, water, energy and money. The beauty of capitalism is that it doesn't let you know how it has made a hole in your pocket.



It showcases large outputs and economies of scale. But economy of scale is only important for large capitalists, as it is about aggregation and accumulation.

**What we need is multitudes of small initiatives and small enterprises spread across with a value system embedded in it.** When we started reStore in 2007, we were a bunch of friends wanting to do something for the farmers. We were done chasing money and feeling bored. We were also being paid more than what we deserved. But when we went around with it, we figured that there wasn't much we could do by going to the rural areas. We could not teach them farming. They knew better. They knew what to do and what not to do. But then there was a market, combining with the government, telling them to do all the wrong things. So it wasn't easy, pitching in. But we had to start somewhere. Then we saw that the markets were so exploitative and even faulty that they were letting the farmers down. So we decided to start at that end.

On one side, the urban folks did not even understand what they were buying or the plight of the farmers who were producing it. So we decided to create a market with a heart; a market that would work for the primary producers, in this case, the farmers. A market that will not be exploiting the people; both the farmers and consumers. Transparency would be one of the tenets - for example, when a consumer buys a product, how much of it goes to the farmer, and also to communicate to them why most of the share should go to the farmer. We also linked it to safe food. So we started working with farmers, helped them move to organic farming, and we started out of a small garage to help them sell their produce. We decided that this space would not just be a retail, but also a space for conversations, education and to spread awareness. It was also a space for experimentation for us, since we wanted to challenge the existing paradigm.

We engaged in conversations around fair share, dignified compensation for the farmers, price of the produce, etc. For example, just because a fair share is given to the farmers, it shouldn't be seen that what we were offering was expensive. And if again they found the price to be high, the correction had to happen somewhere else and not by making the compensation as low as possible for the farmer. Because systemically, the farmers had been made dependent on big companies and the State, thereby increasing their cost of production.

That was how reStore was born. **We eventually had thousands of customers whom we sensitised on genetically modified plants, on farmer's suicides, etc.** And hence the importance of enterprises in having these movements. Enterprises are not just sheer enterprises. It could be a sheer commerce activity, but it can have a lot of these activities built along with it. The important thing is the social consciousness that we build. So we should look at the economic activity in a sensitive and sensible manner, for whom we will be working, whom our sweat is going for.

And the importance of looking at the entire value chain. Take the same case of cotton. If we are growing cotton, it has to be organic. To grow it, we should be working with women for whom it will provide a dignified compensation and better livelihood. If it has to be woven next, it should go to a handweaving weaver instead of a machine or a mill. And then if it has to be dyed, we should be using natural dyes, and so on. As I say this, it is also important to note that even in Gandhi's days, khadi was costly. Clothes that were coming from England were cheaper than that were produced in India. Because khadi was handmade while the other was machine made.

So we have had many queries along the journey, whether reStore will open elsewhere, put up an outlet in other cities, etc. But that is not what we want to have.

We don't want to be running 300 stores, but we want 300 stores run by 300 different people. And this is not a random number I gave. In the 4th year of reStore, we had 300 organic stores in Chennai. And today there are 500 organic stores in Chennai. We went to parks, schools, colleges, apartments, giving talks and presentations, creating awareness and creating demand. And this is a very unique thing in the whole of India. At least 25-30% of these stores don't have any plastic packaging or branding. They are directly procured from the farmers. reStore is 100% plastic free. People have to bring their own bag, their own containers for oil, etc.

At the same time, running individual stores also increases the cost of the product. The per kilo transportation cost, itself gets higher. So that was how Organic Farmers Market (OFM) was born, which is a cooperative, collective model. We reinvented the distribution model in a different way. It was 'Buy them For them'. So for 15 people running different stores, there was a central procurement process for ordering products from the farmers and then it would be redistributed to the 15 stores. This again reduced a lot of cost.

Later we started Tula. It was organic cotton, hand spun, hand woven, natural dyed and tailored. So in the entire process, it touches at least 6-10 livelihoods. That type of livelihood creation is very important. Ford has come to Chennai and invested 8000 crore rupees, creating livelihoods for 2000 people, which is basically 4 crore rupees per employment. But for rural based employment generation, we won't need more than 10-15 lakh rupees of investment. So we should also challenge it in that sense. **What is the cost of investment per employment?** That is one of the best ways to make it small, bring it back to rural India and make it more meaningful. Also our commerce cannot be isolated from ecology or social problems.

For example in India, a weaver is given 15 rupees per metre on an average for weaving which in itself is a very low remuneration, it is highly exploitative. At the same time, there is always a woman who is there with the weaver and she is not even considered, recognised or paid. The 15 rupees goes to the man who does 50% of the work. The woman does the sizing, starching, reeling, etc., and 'he', the weaver does the weaving. But just 'he' is being paid, and that too 15 rupees. This is what is to be challenged. What we did at Tula was we gave three times the price to the weaver for weaving, and the woman was considered a separate entity, an individual worker, and paid them as well. With this the cost of the final product increases. And it is important to explain to the world that there is a right and dignified remuneration that has gone to all the people in the value chain. This is the kind of social impact our enterprises should create and this is the kind of role we should play in the economy. **Thus by having multitudes of small enterprises with a heart, we can challenge the exploitative capitalist system where a handful of people hold 90% of the market.** Our commerce should be rooted in social and ecological justice which will touch people and take this further ahead.

Now talking about India HandMade Collective. When the lockdown happened, the Tula store had to be closed for 3-4 months. But the primary producers had to keep on working, the spinners and weavers. It was their only livelihood and income. And when the garment stores were allowed to open, there wasn't much sale too. And as a result, we had a lot of stock piled up. And it was the same with other groups as well. And most people started talking about creating websites, selling online. We thought it was better to have a common website, a common place for the sale of these products. Instead of 25 people trying to drive 25 different things, we would have 25 people's energies in one place, thus benefiting all. This is also envisioned as a 'Buy them For them' website where there is no accrual of profit, but the primary producers will be benefitted. That is what India HandMade Collective (IHMC) is. And we are inviting more handloom handicrafts producers to make their products available and sell them through IHMC."

## Q & A

**Q. How do you collaborate with a larger number of people where everyone's value systems are different?**

**A.** I will share it within the context of IHMC. So at Tula, all our products are organic cotton, hand spun, hand woven and organic dyed. There is no compromise there. But the different collaborators at IHMC may not be following all of this. But we go for a non-negotiable of hand woven. There can't be any machine woven products with us. Someone doing handweaving might be buying a machine spun cotton, which is fine for now. But how can we gradually bring them to follow all these values is the approach. We may be ready to make some compromises given the fundamentals are in place, and then slowly increase the value. Because IHMC was about supporting livelihoods that were in distress. These compromises could be made. But at Tula, we are addressing a different concern, a different market. This clarity helps in making these decisions.

**Q. It is understood that the price you quote for your garments at Tula is justified. But for many people, even ecologically and socially conscious people, it is not accessible due to its cost. How do you address this?**

**A.** It is because we see only from one value, money. The true cost is not seen in the machine made, fast fashion. How much the labourers are paid, the pollution cost of chemical dyeing, the effluent that was thrown into a river, etc., are all costs that are unseen or overlooked. What will happen to the synthetic material after years? It is going to come in as microplastic into your soil, water, etc. All of this is included in the true cost of a 300 rupees t-shirt. It is only cheaper because the environmental impact is neglected. Having said that, a silk-weaver would find it really difficult to buy a silk sari for themselves. It is a shameful economic system that has been created. So when we set up ReStore, one condition we made with the farmers was that if we are buying 500 kilograms of rice or vegetables from you, you should keep 50 kilograms for yourself, or else we will not buy from you. It is a challenge. Initially people from a certain higher economic class only would buy our organic produce. After years of effort, now the middle class is also able to buy it, but we cannot go below. The poor cannot. It is a shameful thing that those who need it the most cannot afford it. So we started engaging with the government saying they should take the responsibility of taking the safe and healthy food to them by bringing it to the Public Distribution System. We have succeeded in certain parts of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. So that is part of the next level of socially active things we should be taking up.

**Gijs Spoor** | [gijs@auroville.org.in](mailto:gijs@auroville.org.in)

Gijs is a social entrepreneur with a background in organic agriculture and fair trade. His specialties are: Sustainable Textiles Supply Chain Development, Rural Development, Hybrid profit/non-profit Organisation Development, Strategy, Systems Thinking, Fair trade, Organic Agriculture and Alternative Economy. His inspiration comes from having lived on an organic farm in Rajasthan, India, and having learned how to farm, sell, design projects and mobilise communities for social change. His mentor farmer is Inder Dan Detha, Borunda village, Jodhpur.



His current interests are self-reliant communities, localisation of currencies and food systems, and alternatives to air travel. Gijs has pledged not to fly anymore, so he is seeking ways to journey between India where he lives with his family, and Europe where his mother lives.

Gijs started his session with asking a set of questions to the participants.

What is Wealth for you?

Where do you look for it in your life?

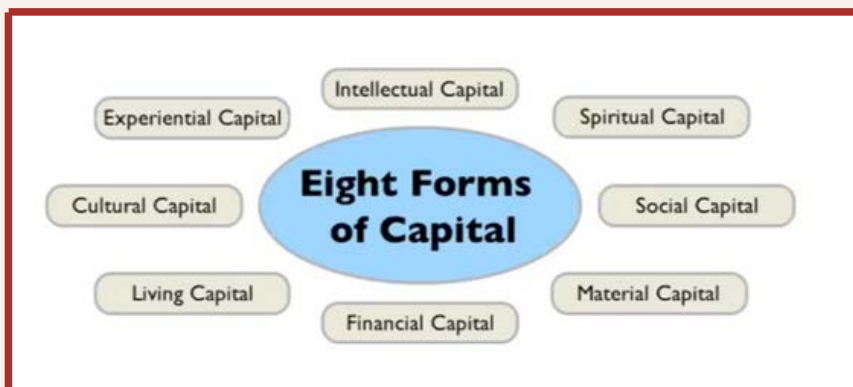
Can you mention an experience when you were feeling wealthy?

Following were the highlights of responses of different participants.

- Uncomfortable relationship with wealth and everything associated with that, like glamour, etc. Uncomfortable both while asking for money, or while giving it to others. I don't like bargaining, I just give what people ask for.
- To me, it means a salary; when I work, I get paid. This is a limited amount that I need for survival, but I don't look for more than that. Not looking to earn too much, just enough.
- Wealth to me has this connotation of excess, more than that you need. Do not like the concept of having an 'excess' of something.
- Very similar approach to wealth, we need money for sustenance but I don't like glamorization.
- There are different ways in which money can support. I'm more comfortable giving money away, rather than accepting it.
- Wealth is something that gets your work done. I associate it with comfort, it keeps me from being in a vulnerable position. In Ladakh, we have a big focus on local products now. Wealth would be to see this grow. When we go outside, money is still the only thing you can use outside.
- More positive relationship with money. Wealth to me is 360 degrees certainty, relative certainty. Not just in terms of money, it includes relationships and other aspects as well such as health, my environment, my codependence on other things around me. Everything that helps me become the best version of myself.
- Relationship with money is similar to that of Robin Hood. I would like to rob from the rich and give to the poor.
- More transactional relationship with money. You need it to get by. It's a means of getting stuff done.
- The meaning of wealth for me has changed over time. I want to be able to live in the mountains and offer something to the local community with my knowledge. That is wealth for me.

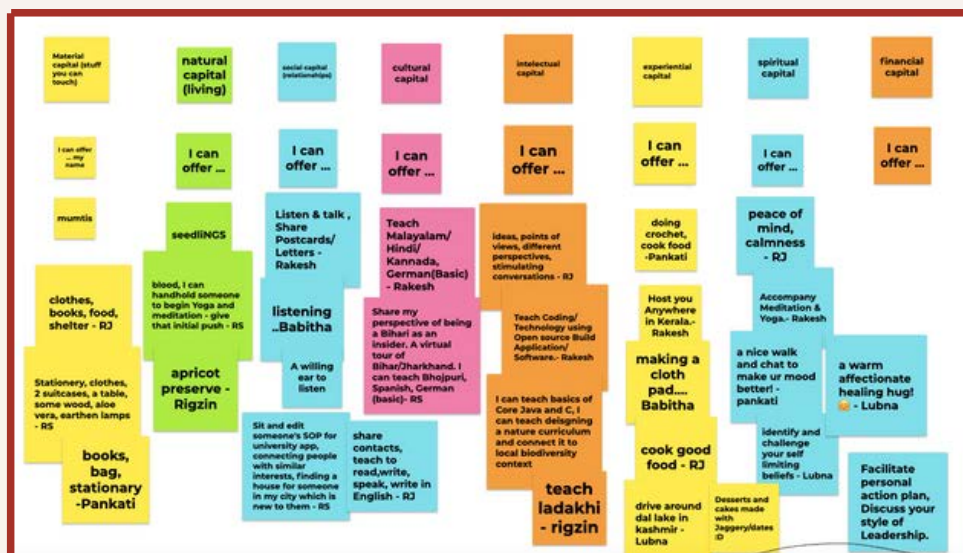
The conversations were followed by Gijs sharing his experience with Wealth and introducing the 8 forms of Capital.

"Money is indeed a tool, a very powerful tool. But it has a lot of ingrained dysfunctionality coded into it. And because it is powerful, it took over many other forms of wealth. I think, if we want to empower ourselves and build a different kind of economy that will create a world we would like to live in, we would like the generations to live in, we need to become literate in a different language around wealth. In my experience, if we think about what we need, we tend to translate most other forms of wealth into money. Wealth could be looked at as a good slave, but a bad master."



- Material capital - things you can be touched and felt. Eg: chair, office space, etc.
- Natural capital - anything that lives, clean air, health, etc.
- Social capital - relationships
- Cultural capital - songs, art, epics, etc.
- Intellectual capital - concepts, theories, frameworks, knowledge
- Experiential capital - embodied knowledge such as hand gliding, juggling, cooking, etc.
- Spiritual capital - related to one's purpose, what one holds sacred, etc.
- Financial capital - money

This was followed by the participants making offerings on each category of capital. A marketplace activity was conducted for exchanges between participants. All participants put up their offerings on a Google Jamboard and asked to make trades. The basic idea of the session was about not translating everything into purely money terms, but understand what one really needed.



**Seno Tsuhah** | [senotsuhah@gmail.com](mailto:senotsuhah@gmail.com)

Seno Tsuhah is a community women leader and a primary school teacher based in Chizami Village of Phek District, Nagaland. She has 20 years of experience working with grassroots communities of Nagaland particularly women and youth on issues of gender, governance, natural resource management and sustainable livelihoods. Besides her engagement with development work in her own community, she is member of other important platforms such as Millet Network of India (MINI), InsightShare Network, NENterprise etc.



"North East Network is based out of Nagaland, a small, mountainous State with a population of about 1.9 million. It is a small State inhabited by indigenous communities, and is rich in biodiversity. We have 16 different major tribes in Nagaland.



**Women play a very important role in livelihoods.** You see street vendors, women collecting wild edibles, the millet based agro- biodiverse farming communities follow, craft work that occupy the central stage of our life, rural life especially. All these diverse livelihoods are part of our culture. These are skills very much followed by the rural communities of our State.

**COVID-19 impacted the lives of people in our communities as well, like all others.** We have seen the hardships people have faced when the immediate lockdown announcement was made, and continue to face. In our community too, food, livelihood and health were some of the areas that were deeply impacted. When we faced these in the month of March, we were lost initially, this was the first time our generation had faced a pandemic and such uncertainty. We started to think how to reach our community who are still technologically denied, to pass on the right kind of information to them. The women; the women farmers, vendors and artisans came together, and they were digitally trained. The community facilitators shared about how the community can keep itself strong, cope with the crisis and how we could help out by creating awareness, then education, followed by action.

They reached out to their own neighbours and spread awareness, which was the first step North East Network facilitated in its communities. We created a lot of [participatory videos](#) where we communicated with our community members and tried to understand how they were responding to COVID. This was also one mode by which we reached out to the communities and shared about the importance of biodiversity, of growing our own food, of coming together and helping each other.





### Securing vending spaces through collective actions

One section of community we work with are the street vendors in the semi-urban and urban areas. They were the most affected. They could not go to the usual vending spaces where they earned their livelihood, and were forced to lock themselves down in their homes. And in a couple of weeks, they started to panic. There were situations when the land owners and house owners pressured them to pay the bill and the rent. They faced all forms of crisis; from food insecurity to the threatening situation of being asked to move out of where they lived. But the collective strength of the women was so beautiful and inspiring. They jointly approached the municipal councilors and the government and availed vending spaces. There were nearly 300 vendors who were part of the group, but only 80 vendors were initially given space. They collectively decided to give the opportunity to the people who needed it the most. Everyone was in need, but space was created for those who were the most marginalised and affected. This collective spirit and action is something I would like more communities to learn and incorporate.



### Building Solidarity

Rural women foraged edible herbs from the forests and harvested crops and vegetables from the fields and shared it with the people living in the urban areas. This was sent from the villages to the neighbouring towns which didn't have access to fresh food during the lockdown. They were kept outside the different hospitals and traffic islands, where people could just pick up the vegetables they needed.

It was the section of society who is usually considered as poor, shared what they had with those in the urban areas where everything had come to a standstill. They felt it was their responsibility to share food with them. It is also interesting that the farming communities went way out of their comforts and reached people in need with any kind of relief. All of them had very small, fragmented farm land holdings. This kind of coming together, supporting each other, building solidarity and showing kindness and compassion is something which the world needs today.



### Engaging youth in Agriculture

When the lockdown happened, the schools and colleges got closed, which was a wakeup call for many. The parents who were into farming encouraged their children to take up farming. The families went together to their farmlands. There was no farmland that was left untouched because of lack of labourers. Usually it used to be only the elders, and mostly women who tilled the land and sustained their families through farming. But now, a lot of young people joined their parents. Even the youth who had gone to urban areas looking for other kind of jobs came back and realised that they cannot depend on the market, and thereby the importance of growing their own food. This was a positive thing that happened due to the pandemic.

### Quarantine centres as Creativity hubs

Young people who came back to the village were being quarantined. There came up an idea to convert the quarantine centre into a creativity hub. The community participated in building these hubs with bamboo and other materials available. Tools to engage in different craft work for the young people quarantining to engage in were provided. These were young people working in restaurants, call centres and in hospitality sectors. Notebooks, paint, brush, diaries, were provided so that they don't consider the quarantine centre as a depressing place. A space to reflect and see what they can do, what livelihoods they could adopt in the village and so on. It was also a testing ground whether they could see other alternatives of livelihoods in their own villages, whether they can see themselves fitting in their own ecosystem instead of going back to the cities. That was a wonderful setting to facilitate reverse migration."

### Q & A

**Q. What was the general response of the youth as they came back and there was a discussion around an alternative lifestyle that involved not going back to the city?**

**A.** For someone who had been dependent on cities for one's livelihood to transition to alternative livelihoods in the village is something that will take time. And that transition is something that should happen out of the explorations of the individual and not because others tell them so or an organisation tells them so. Some people very positively wanted to return to the cities. But there were many who reflected that they never felt safe in the cities and that they felt even more insecure, following the pandemic. They said they will look for opportunities in their community, in their village.



**Q. What led you to do the work that you do?**

**A.** I was born into a farmer family, but my parents didn't want me to indulge in farming. I was always asked to study. I was the first graduate in my family and I really wanted to do something for my community. I was born in an era where my community was recovering from deep wounds of conflict. In spite of the confusion and uncertainties, I had the opportunity to pursue academic education. It was a very social and vibrant community, and as I returned to the community after pursuing my higher education, there was an urge to work with them, especially with the women. They were so resourceful, knowledgeable, whose work wasn't acknowledged. My journey started with hundreds of women from my community who showed faith and trust in me. In 1996 when I started to work with them, I was fresh out of college. The trust they showed in me saying, "we need young people like you to work with us", was so encouraging. I never had second thoughts that I need to go and work elsewhere. I could work in the community I was born into, and I'm happy that this work has now become a collective work and has reached to other communities.

**Q. How does the North-East Network function?**

**A.** North-East Network is a women's organisation, and is based in Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland. We work on three fronts; on gender based violence against women, on governance and state accountability, and on natural resource management and sustainable livelihoods. The idea is to bring women to the center stage in all the work that we do, and the objective is to create a gender just society. To know more about North East Network, you can visit our website: [www.northeastnetwork.org](http://www.northeastnetwork.org)

## Sustaining Movements & Building Synergies

On Day 4 of the sangam, we had a panel discussion on 'Sustaining Movements & Building Synergies' featuring Jiten Yumnam, Tara Krishnaswamy, Sharanya Nayak and Kapil Shah, moderated by Ashish Kothari.

Movements are about changing situations of injustice, oppression, unsustainability, exploitation marginalization and so on, trying to achieve more justice for fairness. While it is important to observe the tension and complementarity between revolution and reform in movements, how do we bring alternative structures in place? And what does it take to sustain movements? How do we pass on movements from one person to another or one generation to another?

The speakers shared their experiences with the various movements they were part of, the strategies and approaches that worked and their learnings from them, which was followed by interaction with the participants.

Have a look at the highlights of what the panelists shared in the following pages.



*"For you, the river is Megawatts. For us, the river is Mother. We won't allow it to be shackled."*

Movement of Adivasi communities in Central India protesting mega hydroelectric projectson the Indravati river.

Photo by Ashish Kothari

**Jiten Yumnam** | [mangangmacha@gmail.com](mailto:mangangmacha@gmail.com)

Jiten Yumnam is Secretary of the Centre for Research and Advocacy, Manipur, an indigenous peoples' human rights organization based in Manipur in North East India. He writes with media establishments in Manipur, viz, Imphal Free Press, E-Pao.net etc. He is also a filmmaker and produces documentary films on indigenous people's rights and issues in Manipur, such as "Wall of Injustice", "Turbulent Waters of Loktak Wetlands", "Oil Exploration: Boon or Bane in Manipur".



Mr. Yumnam is also an Advisor of the Asia Pacific Indigenous Youth Network. He has attended several National and International events related to protection of land, including the International Meet on Protection of Rivers at Tbilisi, Georgia from 28-31 March 2017, the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals at UNHQs, New York, USA from 20-25th September 2015, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at Rio De Janeiro, Brazil in June 2012.

<http://www.cramanipur.wordpress.com/>

"I would like to bring your attention to some of the hydroelectric power projects across the rivers in Manipur which we have been resisting. Due to the Loktak hydroelectric project at Loktak wetlands a lot of people lost their agricultural lands and livelihoods. 3000 sq kms of forest land is to be cleared for the Tipaimukh dam project. Many more such projects, existing and proposed ones are at the cost of the environment, and also causes displacement of people, directly affecting their livelihoods.

Some of the key strategies in sustaining movements include:

- Central involvement of the community: building their awareness, mobilising the community with the right kind of information, coming up with a clear positioning of the community, engaging with youth, women and children, bringing other communities who have experienced the adverse impacts of dam building, etc.
- Continued engagement to broaden the base of the movement: engaging with community leaders, gram sabhas, media, academia, civil society organisations, government, using social platforms to raise awareness among those who are not directly affected as well
- Ensuring intergenerational leadership: involving youth and children in the entirety of the processes
- Addressing the human rights situation: looking at matters from the perspective of human rights along with environmental and social impact, address police brutality and violence due to militarisation"



Evictions in Loktak Wetlands - a reservoir of 105 MW Loktak Hydroelectric Project



Mass rally against the proposed 1500 MW Tipaimukh Dam project

**Tara Krishnaswamy** | [tara\\_krishnaswamy@yahoo.com](mailto:tara_krishnaswamy@yahoo.com)

Tara Krishnaswamy is a voice that is synonymous with demanding equal share of representation of women in politics, policy making and leadership. An untiring crusader and a campaigner for women's rights, she has co-founded Shakti ([politicalshakti-india.org](http://politicalshakti-india.org)) and Citizens for Bengaluru. She happens to be a Software Director of an MNC too.



**10+ years of campaigning**

- Elections:**  
Municipal, MLC, MLA, MP
- Citizen Movements:**  
CfB, Shakti
- Urban Governance:**  
Public Transport, Decentralization
- Gender:**  
Women's Rep, Violence Against Women
- Citizenship:**  
CAA/NRC/NPR
- Anti Corruption:**  
Lokpal, Parliamentary Standing Committees

**Shakti - Political Power To Women  
A Calculated Gambit**

**Shakti**  
POLITICAL POWER TO WOMEN

**Bus Bhagya Beku**  
#NadeyaluBeki  
#SkyWalkBeda  
#MaadariVidhanaSabha

**Elevated Corridor**  
#TenderKadabaAaadi  
Corporator #1  
#NammaSamitiPuraskara

**Steel Flyover Beda**  
#HumanChain Oct 16  
#BedaBallet  
#Satyagraha  
#NammaGoagluJuli

**Chuku Buku Beku**  
#HosaZoningBeda  
#MaraKadiBedi  
#CantonmentStationMetro

**Beku Beda Santhe**  
#PattanadaPatti #CitizensManifesto  
**Namma Samiti Namagaagi**  
#NannaMalaNamamaita  
#ModaluTrainBeku  
#PuraKamikaSalaries

three years and counting...  
**Citizens for Bengaluru**

"I have largely worked on urban governance and women's empowerment. 'Citizens for Bengaluru' initiated a lot of participatory movements on matters related to environment, policy and ad hoc issues such as citizenship issues, violence against women, etc.

One of the successful movements was the protest against a massive steel flyover in Bengaluru, where a lot of people came together and said no to the project. The 6.7 kms steel bridge would have been at the cost of more than 800 trees. Not only would the flyover have a huge impact on the environment, it wouldn't facilitate public transport. We communicated to the world in different ways, through social media, online petitions, press club meetings, etc. We organised a 'Beda (No) ballet' where we collected people's votes by keeping ballet boxes in public places. Daylong satyagrahas with music and art were conducted and so many people including children created art and shared, thus communicated to the public. All this eventually led to the Chief Minister of Karnataka himself saying "If people don't want it, why would I build it", and scrapping the project.



Clockwise from top (1) Public protest against the flyover (2) Citizens for Bengaluru team after the success of the campaign (3) counting of the Beda ballot

While the 'No Steel Flyover' campaign was something that was highlighted by the media, 'Shakti' took up an issue that was not spoken by the media at all. To increase the number of women elected to vidhan sabha and gram sabhas. Not only that the women's representation in the elections were low, it was all male decision makers making decisions on women's issues. We engaged with political parties and conducted campaigns on women's reservation bill, to ensure that all political parties lean towards women participation. We joined hands with numerous movers and shakers, opinion makers, social activists, human rights activists, industrialists, and even organisations which had nothing to do with women's cause. Gradually the media too took this up, and it became a discussion in the Parliament as well. There is a lot to achieve though.

My learnings from the past experiences is that we need to simplify the narrative, communicate to the public, mobilize people, attract volunteers, rouse emotions, and earn the attention of the media. Timing is also important, for example, we took up the campaigns on women's representation when the Loksabha elections were approaching."

**SHAKTI CAMPAIGNS: SET AGENDA**

- DEC 2018: WHY SO FEW WOMEN IN POLITICS
- DEC 2018: CALL OUR MPS
- JAN 2019: CALL WOMEN MLAS
- JAN 2019: PARTY PETITIONS: TICKETS TO WOMEN
- JAN 2019: VOTER SENTIMENT POLL FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES
- FEB 2019: MAXIMISING WOMEN ELECTED TO 17TH LOK SABHA
- MAR 2019: ECI - ENFORCE 1/2 THE BALLOT FOR WOMEN
- MAR-APR-MAY 2019: CANDIDATE PROMPTIONS
- JUL 2019: WOMEN'S RESERVATION BILL

**Sharanya Nayak** | [sharanya.nayak@gmail.com](mailto:sharanya.nayak@gmail.com)

Sharanya lives in a nascent Adivasi farming commune cum cultural learning resource centre at Rangmatipadar in Machhra village of Koraput district. Previously she worked at a funding agency for 16 years in the undivided Koraput region of southern Odisha and since 2015 she has moved from the town to the village to work with Adivasi communities around creating alternative spaces and narratives around Adivasi lives, livelihoods and ways of life. She has also been engaging with and standing in solidarity with Adivasi resistances to the appropriation of their lands, cultures, languages and knowledge systems.



"I have been in solidarity with various resistance movements, largely in the southern part of Odisha, with the Adivasi movements, resistance against land grabbing, mining, feudal landlords occupying tribal lands, and so on. While being part of these movements, the narrative that most often comes out is on constitutional matters, reclaiming constitutional rights, challenging the State, on the oppression of the adivasis, etc. What doesn't come out is that every adivasi movement, from the time they stood up against the British or any feudal or imperial power that tried to grab their land, from Tilka Manjhi to Nachika Linga, have not been just about resistance to assert their rights. But also to assert a way of life or a worldview.

A lot of non-advasi stakeholders in the adivasi movements have not been able to understand this, and hence their focus has always been on constitutional rights. But it is actually a worldview that they are trying to put forward and protect. This is also a resistance between two belief systems. The non-advasi belief system which we call the "dominant society" which is absolutely blind to the adivasi worldview, and the adivasi attempt, the adivasi resistance movements' attempt to tell their story, their relationship with the world, with the rest of nature, and their idea of the "sacred".

As the movements grow, there is also an internal dialogue that happens on how they reflect on their own politics and inequalities within their own community, such as questions around participation of women in decision-making, creating alternatives for the future, giving way to youth in the movements, etc. The value that these movements put forward is that of freedom; freedom in every sense.

In order to sustain the movements from one generation to another, we also have to tackle the question of education. Education has become a tool of propaganda and of appropriation by the State and corporations. So many different mining companies are funding schools in the tribal areas of Odisha, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, etc. with the agenda to remove them from their roots. So one question we engage with is, why has the community's control of education moved away? The adivasi leadership have now started realising that they themselves should take care of their children's education.

One of the anti-mining movements in Mali Parvat showcases the importance of involving children in the movements, making children part of community action and resistance. Children were part of decision making, collective accountability meetings, collective reflection meetings and so on. Those children who took part in the movement in 2003 are now leading various other movements against mining in Odisha. The new generation of leaders were made ready. It is the adivasi movements themselves reimagining their future and the alternatives what we seek for."

***"It is the Adivasi philosophy of collectivism, being one with nature and all its elements, which will ultimately end the cycle of exploitation." - Gunjal Ikir Munda***

**Kapil Shah** | [jatantrust@gmail.com](mailto:jatantrust@gmail.com)

Kapil Shah is a Founding Director of Jatan, which is one of the pioneering organizations in India that enabled a shift towards organic farming from the 1980s. This was done through creating awareness about sustainability of natural resources, quality of food and socio-economic justice to farmers. The pathway chosen was avoidance of market dependent synthetic agri-inputs and by offering due price to farmers for their chemical-free produce.



Jatan is involved in policy advocacy around farmers' seed rights, resisting GM crops, creating markets for organic produce as well as technology transfer through facilitating peer group communication, training and publications. Kapil Shah holds an M.Sc. in plant breeding and Genetics. He wrote/edited more than 20 books and about 50 articles related to the fields JATAN is working in. He remained a Member of several Govt. committees and a founding member of two of the largest organizations active in Organic agriculture and anti-GM movement in India, namely, Alliance of Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA) and Organic Farming Association of India (OFAI). He is based in Vadodara, Gujarat.

"My journey started at the age of 22 when as an MSc student I realised that what was being taught in the Agricultural University was not going to be sustainable. I run an initiative called Jatan, a mission for organic farming, which we call *sajeev kheti* in Gujarati. We coined this term in 1985, and in my life, the word '*sajeev kheti*' came first and 'organic farming' came later.

'Organic' comes from my love for nature, 'farming' comes from my academic training and 'mission' comes from my social background. A contradiction I saw was that the technology applied by the farmers and promoted by the industry and governments were killing the earthworms that were otherwise called farmer-friendly.

What I am involved is in *rachna* (construction) more than *sangharsh* (resistance). I am associated with many local organisations and initiatives in Gujarat through Jatan, and also associated with Organic Farming Association of India and ASHA which has four pillars, which are income security for farmers, ecological sustainability of agriculture, people's control over natural resources, and access to safe food and nutrition for all. We work at grassroots and in policy advocacy as well.

If I am to share some of the learnings from the past, one is that diversity matters in any campaign. Diversity in terms of the people who stand with you, the people whom you reach out to, stakeholders you engage with, etc. Connection with the grassroots is important for the movement to sustain. One should be ready to learn from failures and let go of ego. Dedication for the cause, mutual love and respect for your people, and the ability to quarrel and to resolve important as well.

A strategy we have had at ASHA is maintaining equal distance with all political parties. We always cooperate with farmer organisations, unions, companies, NGOs, academic institutions, etc. It is also important to respond quickly, that too with less of rhetoric and in a more of scientific manner. We need a scientific vigour in promoting organic farming, resisting the genetically modified crops by putting forward the relationship between plants, science, health, land, water, etc. in scientific terms.

Also, circumstances matter. If Jairam Ramesh wasn't the Environment Minister at that time, we wouldn't have achieved what we achieved in terms of resisting genetically modified seeds and crops. You also need people in power to hear you out."

# Collaborations & Closing

On Day 5 of the sangam, we did a collective visioning exercise based on the experiences and learnings from the previous days of the sangam. We also listed down what we were willing to drop or negotiate for the alternative future we all envisioned.



Later, we set the ground for collaborations. The context was that to be able to journey towards the kind of future we envision, we can't stay in isolation or work in isolation. There is a lot of hand holding that needs to be done, larger support to be offered and gathered. There is much that we need to collaborate on and co-create.

But how do we collaborate? We know collaboration is where individuals or organisations come and work together to achieve a common goal. And what it requires is a kind of togetherness that comes from a space of authenticity. And it is imperative that we hold to the values that help people to be together and work together, in spite of the urgency of any vision. Which is why it is important for us to build relationships, and not networks. To be able to operate from the heartspace and not headspace, for the kind of work that we do to sustain.

We listed down the top aspects and values we would hold on to in a collaboration.





Continuing with the intent to create space for collaboration and co-creation to happen within the group, we moved to the next activity of offering and receiving support. Each of the participants listed down both what they were in the capacity to offer and the support they required in terms of knowledge, skills, resources, tools, expertise, and more. After which, the participants shared their experiences of the Youth Vikalp Sangam in smaller breakout groups. We then closed the sangam by sharing our reflections and feelings.

**What are the thoughts, emotions and feelings that are alive in you, as we close the Youth Vikalp Sangam?** Mentimeter

Connections	Would have liked some more of it	togetherness, Content, Trust
Looking forward to at least one meaningful collaboration and friendship next year, being born from this Sangam	slowing down, thinking about why I am doing what I am doing, desire to explore and travel, excited by everything around me, sense of solidarity	when can we have a physical youth vikalp sangam!?!?!?
A group hug is pending! Damn you, Covid!	We should do more Youth Sangams.....the learning, hope and connections made are strong, vibrant and loving. It is resilience for the future!	Slowing down, Collaborations, Friendships, Adventures, Future
inspiration	Hopeful, with a dollop of calmness and a dash of anxiety. Looking forward to collaborations and real life meetings and organising.	A hope created , many possibilities have opened up. Looking to create more such spaces for all. Even the ones who are choosing to look the other way.
Kejal Ashik Shruti Pankti Sujata Wind Ashish Shrishtee are the coolest people I met in December	The need to stand with each other, the need to check in, checking in, the need to sleep over some things than always wanting to prove a point. Positivity is alive. The will to help more, is alive.	Self-care for all of us working hard and remembering that this is a long marathon 30-40 years more
There is so much love for this community of people who came together for YVS, sharing their stories and expertise. Making connections possible. Looking forward to more possibilities of togetherness and co-creation.	That I can do it,	happy to be connected to diverse dynamic people...Looking forward to stay conncted and support....

# Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology (OST) is a way to organize meetings and sessions in a free flowing, fluid manner, honouring what comes up alive within the group. Open Space Technology lacks a fixed structure and design, and welcomes surprises. The idea is to harness the collective wisdom of the group to make it available for the whole group.

While the flow and activities of 2 hours each on 5 days of the sangam was predesigned and preplanned, OST was opened up for the participants and organisers to take a lead in hosting sessions. A total of 16 OST sessions were offered during the 10 days the Sangam spanned. OST sessions became the space where the participants bonded with each other and got to know deeper about each other's work, despite the Sangam happening online.

Date	Host	Time	Offering / Session / Activity	Other details
27 Nov, Fri	Ashik	9:00 - 10:00 p.m.	Chocolate making from cocoa beans	Learn to make your own chocolate and chocolate spread directly from cocoa beans according to your own preferences of taste, sweetness, bitterness, darkness, vegan, non-vegan, flavours, etc., with minimum ingredients (3) and equipments. We won't be making the actual chocolate during this one hour, but I shall share my experiences and learning, and also connect you with organic cocoa farmers.
28 Nov, Sat	Aravind	10:00pm-11:00pm	Unpopular opinions	Just discussing all unpopular opinons!!
29 Nov, Sun	Pritu	10:30 - 11:30 A.M	School of Nature	Conversation on the journey of the initiative to retain indigenous knowledge systems and practices intact in Odisha
	Yuvan & Siddharth	1:30 - 3:00 PM	A chat about walking.	We'll talk about the idea of walking - in nature, in cities, and the politics of it. This is a chat, not a talk. :)
	Anjali, Sriranjini and Babitha	4:00 - 5:30 PM	Sustainable Menstruation	We'll explore menstruation, taboos, ecology and gender, misconceptions, sustainable menstrual products, and other thoughts! For all genders and ages, menstruators and non-menstruators alike :)
30 Nov, Mon	Dongar Rajan and everyone who is joining in	7:00 - 8:30 p.m.	Confessions: towards articulating the politics of our positions	Invitation to interrogate the contradictions in our minds.
01 Dec, Tue	Ashik	7:00 - 8:00 p.m.	Zero waste travel	Sharing experiences and practices towards attempting zero waste, sustainable, green travel!
	Radhika Jhaveri	9:30 - 10:30 p.m.	Mental Health	Conversations surrounding Mental Health
02 Dec, Wed	Ashish Kothari	7:00 - 8:30 p.m.	Vikalpana: Express Your Utopia!	What is your vision of an ideal future ... for yourself, your community, India/South Asia, humanity, or life in general? Express it in a doodle, drawing, poem, limerick, short story or prose, movement, song, or any other creative form. Don't be shy ... everyone has visions of what they think is ideal ... and everyone has some creativity!
	Lubna Rafiqi	9:30pm-11:00pm	What motivates us!	Everyday is a rollercoaster of hope and hopelessness. We juggle between giving up and getting up. At one moment we understand everything, at another we fail to make sense of it it lives. But the reality is we are here, we wake up every morning, we aim, set our goals, we dream! Where does our hope come from? What do we imagine we we start again?  It's a space to share experiences about the hopes and powers we possess amidst the crisis and helplessness!
03 Dec, Thu	Fatema	11:00 a.m - 12:30pm	Environmental Education	A gathering to brainstorm on environmental education, setting up a context based curriculum on environmental conciousness in a broader sense for local schools. Everyone who feels connected is requested to join.
	YVS Team	7:00 - 8:00 p.m.	Campaigns & Collective Proposals	To discuss and articulate ideas for creating a space for the participants to invite support for the various campaigns, movements and collectives they are part of, on Day 5 of YVS
	Kejal/Aravind	9:30pm-11:00pm	Deep-Democracy	The current model of democracy is deeply flawed, it listens to what the majority has to say at the cost of the minorities. But what if there is an alternative to the current model of majoritarian democracy being followed across the globe?? One that can ensure there is no violence towards the "minorities". Join this session to learn more about how a 100% consensus based democracy can work in today's world.
04 Dec, Fri	Madhyama	3:00 - 4:00p.m.	Community Building	Basic tools for building a community stronger -  We will have some games/exercises to identify how do we begin to connect with a group or community. What binds us. Also discover how as an individual we can take part to bring a each other together to form a community.
	Rachita	6-7 PM	Futures	Think of one goal that you want to achieve in life. It could be a personal or a professional goal. We will be planning various scenarios for that one goal through this activity and these different scenarios(or paths) will take you towards your goal. The goal should be something achievable, like a milestone. The goal could also be something that will help you realise your higher purpose.
	Shruti	9:00-10:00pm	Youth in Conservation	This space is to begin conversation to anyone who are engaged or keen to engage with conservation related work and are working with communities. To delve deeper into questions of what is conservation for you? How does one perceive conservation and lamenting on the larger politics of biodiversity conservation? Are research around conservation science inclusive?  A space understand challenges and strengths in your work and to explore possibilities of collaboration and solidarities in the future.

# The Journey

On Day 1 of the Youth Vikalp Sangam, we got introduced to each other and each other's work. On Day 2 of Visioning Alternatives, we looked at the flower of transformation. The different petals of which were Democracy, Economics, Society, Culture & Knowledge, Environment. We reflected on which petal each of our work fell into, and which other petals we wanted to transition to, as well. And at the centre of all of these were a bunch of values we considered important, or what we were guided by. Space to dialogue, Sharing-caring, knowledge in the open source or commons, communicating to the heart, slowing down, non-monetary exchanges, collaborations, gender equality, diversity, need for eco-conscious livelihoods, retaining traditional knowledge systems and practices, passing the mic and enabling the afflicted to speak for themselves, localisation, and so on and many more.

On Day 3, we had a dialogue on Sustainable Livelihoods and building Resilience in the light of the COVID-19 impact. We looked into the importance of a distributed economy for a just world, on why we need multitudes of small initiatives across the country and beyond, how commerce in itself is not bad, but the need to bring the heart to the money. We heard about gendered stories of resilience, the crucial role women play in sustaining traditional livelihoods, in contributing to the wellbeing of the community, in managing natural resources and more. We explored what wealth means to us, the different forms of capital and how identifying our needs helps us navigate forward.

And on Day 4, we looked into how various Movements have sustained over the years, how movements can and should build synergies with other movements. We saw the importance of engaging with communities, youth, children, government, media, universities and more, in sustaining movements. We saw the importance of having a simple narrative, constant and clear communication, and the power of arts and creativity in mobilizing more people for the causes and campaigns. We as well saw the importance of involving children in decision making and the need for more intergenerational dialogues and cross dialogues that are required.

And in between all of these, we had the OST sessions and hangouts where we all brought in our unique gifts and stories and shared them with the rest of the group. These sessions and conversations helped us to connect with each other better and deeper, in spite of the lack of a shared physical space.

Finally on Day 5, the last day of the Sangam, we closed with seeding intention and setting the ground for collaboration amongst each other. We believe, creating more such spaces where the youth can authentically learn, share, inspire and be inspired will eventually lead to building an alternative future we all envision. This is the collective wisdom which emerged out of the group and the event. This would be the conclusion and in some ways the *raison d'être* for more such gatherings.

## Participant Profiles

**Aadya Singh** | [aadyasingh@gmail.com](mailto:aadyasingh@gmail.com)

Over the last decade, Aadya has been exploring the intersection between livelihoods, environmental conservation and skill development with a focus on Himalayan communities. After a masters in Development Studies from IIT-Madras, Aadya gained early experience in rural livelihoods and environmental conservation with CHIRAG and WWF-India. Following that, her experience of 7+ years working on livelihoods and skill development in non-urban India motivated her to focus on non-traditional livelihood support, awareness generation and agency building for rural and small-town youth, which she is now working on through her role as the founder of India and Bharat Together (IABT). In addition, she volunteers her time to manage the Himalaya Collective, a digital platform bringing together information, news and opportunities for a network of organisations working in the Western Himalayas, brought together by Vikalp Sangam. In her spare time, she enjoys playing pretend naturalist, musician, photographer and writer, and has dabbled in freelance writing for a number of platforms. She enjoys being in the outdoors and exploring new landscapes in the mountains as well.



**Anjali Dalmia** | [anjalidalmia@gmail.com](mailto:anjalidalmia@gmail.com)

Anjali loves spending time in and exploring villages and natural spaces. She is extremely passionate about marine ecosystems, urban planning, and exploring ways to redefine who, or what, is an 'expert'. Anjali is a co-founder of the Yugma Network ([https://linktr.ee/yugma\\_network](https://linktr.ee/yugma_network)), The Project Amara (sustainable and equitable menstruation for all, <https://instagram.com/theprojectamara>), and PLANT: People's Living Archive of Native Trees. She also works with SAPACC Maharashtra & Youth. She is currently representing India at the international Mock COP26.



**Anushree Tendolkar** | [anushree.tendolkar@gmail.com](mailto:anushree.tendolkar@gmail.com)

Anushree is an architect by profession, practicing natural and ecologically sensitive construction. She graduated from Academy of Architecture, Mumbai in 2014. During college she was fortunate to have a teacher, Architect Malaksingh Gill, who inspired her to tread the path of Ecological Architecture. She then later worked with Thannal where she learned about the on ground practice of natural construction with values with Architect Biju Bhaskar.

She has been practicing with natural methods of construction using mud, lime, bamboo & more after her training with traditional masons & masters. She then founded [Dhirty Hands](#) in her hometown, Thane, which is working in construction, research and documentation of traditional buildings, towards spreading awareness about the same through teaching and co-learning through hands-on workshops. She is also a visiting faculty at various colleges at Mumbai. Art work and hand made illustrations are what she enjoys doing!



**Babitha P S** | [babitha.p.s.tvm@gmail.com](mailto:babitha.p.s.tvm@gmail.com)

Babitha is an Engineer turned Social Worker who is passionate to work with children and young adults. She has been actively involved in the realms of Sustainability, Waste Management and Education since 2012. She has a fellowship in Holistic Education from Bhoomi College Bangalore. She is the Co-Founder of Sustainable Menstruation Kerala Collective, a platform which bring together educators, practitioners, activists, youth and organisations to open up missing dialogues on Menstrual Rights and Equity. She is one among the Founding Members and Senior Mentor of Green Army International.



**Fatema Chappalwala** | [fatema@sambhaavnaa.org](mailto:fatema@sambhaavnaa.org)

Fatema is an environmental enthusiast, who started her journey of learning and unlearning through questioning our education system and finding new ways of education for her newborn son ten years ago. This journey led herself and her husband to quit the consumerist lifestyle of Mumbai and start a fresh alternative living and learning by shifting to the countryside. They then found a community and the Institute of like minded people in the lap of Dhauladhar mountain range, which is called Sambhaavnaa Institute of Public Policy and Politics, based in

Palampur, Himachal Pradesh. Here she coordinates an after school children's learning center which engages with children on varied themes, including environmental consciousness.



**Karthik Gunasekar** | [gkarthik.gunasekar@gmail.com](mailto:gkarthik.gunasekar@gmail.com)

Karthik is a youngster from Chennai working on farmers and environment related issues. He works for a couple of farmer related civil society organisations called PGS Organic Council and Keystone Foundation in promoting Participatory Guarantee System among farmers and consumers. Karthik is also an active part of a voluntary collective called Chennai Climate Action Group which works for various environment related issues in Tamilnadu. Karthik also volunteers for a few environment and farmer based organisations - Poovulagin Nanbargal, ASHA etc.

He felt that the problem of ecological crisis and economic inequality are intertwined and both have a common solution. He set out on his journey in the alternate sector to explore the possibility of this common solution and is cherishing every moment of it.

Check out his articles and videos on <https://linktr.ee/karthikg13>



**Lubna Rafiqi** | [rafiqilubna@gmail.com](mailto:rafiqilubna@gmail.com)

Lubna Rafiqi was born on a curfewed morning in Kashmir. She has a training in psychology. She has 7 years of experience working with young people towards change. Lately she had a breakthrough experience that changed her paradigm and shifted her focus to change 'with in'. currently she is exploring human belief systems, consciousness and infiniteness. Through Mool sustainability research and training Center and sagg eco village, Lubna helps people find their purpose in life by teaching them to challenge their self created fears, self limiting beliefs and practice 'imagination, infinity, balance'.

Lubna facilitates workshops on motivations for aspiring entrepreneurs. She does healing sessions with groups and with individuals. Another area Lubna wants to work on is relationships, especially parent-children, which she believes shapes the belief system of an individual.



**Madhyama Halder** | [madhyamahalderrmh2015@gmail.com](mailto:madhyamahalderrmh2015@gmail.com)

Madhyama completed her Graduation in Psychology in 2012 from Calcutta University and M.A from Rabindra Bharati University in Bharatanatyam in 2015. Then she joined theatre and after 3 years of finding the core languages of her body she has found new aspects of life through her dance, which is organic and natural. She has found that, for her, Environment is the basic tool of life. In the city she lives, she conceived so many destructive things going on every moment around her.

She is a cultural motivator and facilitator for kids on environmental awareness at Jaladarsha Collective. She has also worked with some villagers in a storm-prone area in Sundarban on Mangrove afforestation, Seed Restoration and Sustainable Livelihood. Then slowly she has started to survey the water bodies of Kolkata and few areas of Sundarban and she has got to know about the natural hazards closely. She takes workshops on women empowerment in the villages of Sundarban. Now after all these, finally she has made a form of her own, which represents her city through her body and dance. She has discovered that the city is running in a rhythm of mechanism where ponds, fields, soil, wind and the birds are crying, because of the privatization of their places. She can empathize with the aspects of this environmental crisis and she moves her body with this pain of the city.

Check out these links to her work. The Fly - <https://youtu.be/BeUiKIsK4CI> | Nadi, The River - <https://youtu.be/JYx6-OtOrGA> | Sunderbans, a call for water justice - <https://youtu.be/qzzjYjgnGfE>



**Manvendra Singh Inaniya** | [manvendra@disroot.org](mailto:manvendra@disroot.org)

Manvendra loves working with forests and people. He dropped out of engineering college, did a course on sustainability with Bhoomi College, farmed for a while, campaigned on Sustainable Agriculture issues with Greenpeace India for 3 years and then worked with Alaap to restore the native forests of the Himalayan region, specifically Uttarakhand. These days he works independently. He lives in Champawat Uttarakhand but travels to different places to work on afforestation projects. He teaches the Miyawaki Method of Native Forestation to the curious lot.

He works with his partner, Ruth, to conduct social and environmental programs as part of Haijalo, where the local youth of Champawat are working with their own communities to make it a better place to live in. Well, at least a better place for us, we like our space clean. He also works with a gang of misfits called Keeda who go around helping folks in development and alternative spaces to bring more impact to their work.



**Nikhil Kothari** | [nikhil.r.k.10@gmail.com](mailto:nikhil.r.k.10@gmail.com)

Nikhil has worked with reforestation activity in sahyadri mountains for 12+ years. He has been conducting a lifestyle correction course named Medicine Free Life for more than 6 years. He has been part of creating a self-sustainable community known as Serene Eco Village in Velhe, Pune. He also works with villagers for local employment and reverse migration.

To know about Medicine Free Life, visit: <http://medicinefreelife.com>

To know about Serene Eco Village, visit: <http://sereneecovillage.com>



**Partha Protim Bordoloi** | [parthaf2f@gmail.com](mailto:parthaf2f@gmail.com)

Partha is a Program Coordinator at Farm2Food Foundation, Jorhat, Assam. A graduate in Sociology and a postgraduate in Social Work, he is currently pursuing Agroecology. He has been associated with Farm2Food Foundation for almost three years, during which he has engaged in the exchange programme of Reachout Foundation, the jagrik programme of Commutiny - the Youth Collective, and as a programme associate of Farmpreneur.



**Prachi Mittal** | [pmprachimittal@gmail.com](mailto:pmprachimittal@gmail.com)

Prachi is working in the field of self-designed learning and self-designed lives. She is a Chemical engineer by training following which she spent 5 years working with education tech startups. She stumbled upon the idea of democratic education and Swaraj and finally decided to detach herself from the destructive global economy. At this point, she is interested in building learning models which support individuals to design their education. She is experimenting with creating choice based learning environments and spaces to proliferate the idea of Alivelihoods, Self-designed learning, and Conscious living.

She is a co-creator of an initiative called Pitaara ([pitaara.org](http://pitaara.org)). She also hosted an Alivelihoods Career Mela (<https://www.alivelihoods.in/>) in November 2020 which was intended to create awareness about non-exploitative careers amongst the youth.



**Pritu Vatsa** | [vatsapritu@gmail.com](mailto:vatsapritu@gmail.com)

Pritu is a dreamer, free soul, a learner in the school of life and a believer in co-creation of holistic spaces. She is to be found mostly in and around forests, streams, mountains and villages, currently learning and sharing with the indigenous communities in Odisha and practising sustainability. Her journey started when she quit Masters which she was pursuing from JNU, Delhi after a year. The inner calling was to work on the grassroots. She worked as a Gandhi Fellow and later with a few organizations on the grassroots. She has been working in spaces across India, largely on education, since 2016.

She also has been working in collaboration with Eco-Femme in parallel, trying to reach women and girls. With them she conducts workshops on eco-menstruation, body image, body discomfort, stigmas and taboos related to menstruation. Her initiative called the '[School of Nature](#)' with the Kondh community in Odisha is about making education culturally relevant, context specific and ecologically rooted. Social media: <https://facebook.com/SchoolOfNatureOdisha/> | <https://www.instagram.com/schoolofnatureodisha/>



**Rachita Sinha** | [rachita@youcan.in](mailto:rachita@youcan.in)

Rachita is the Co-Founder of YouCAN initiative (Youth Conservation Action Network) and is an educator with an immense passion for nature. She firmly believes that education must be reimagined inclusive of nature and not in an independent manner. As an individual hailing from Jharkhand, a place that combines lush forests, rich minerals, and a state where unemployment and poverty are so high, she understands how holistic education is the missing block. Now more than ever, with the pandemic suffering, we need to realize that we cannot learn about Science, Social Science, Gender, Culture, Politics, and the Economy independent of nature. Hence, Rachita focuses her time and energy to empower youth to improve eco-literacy in their communities. Through the Earth Ambassadors Fellowship, a one-year program that she conceived with her life partner and Co-founder, she has supported youth to become environmental educators. She has been a Changelooms fellow at Pravah and a GP Birla women leader fellow at the Ananta Aspen Center. She has completed the Change Leadership Certificate with the East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii in June 2020. She is currently set out to learn about Gender-Inclusive Leadership through EWC's Asia-Pacific tailored program to understand deep-rooted issues, to build initiatives on true inclusivity for womxn in every aspect, to better work towards sustainability. She has also completed 5 National Geographic Education courses rooted in bringing nature into every classroom.



**Radhika Jhaveri** | [radhikachemical@gmail.com](mailto:radhikachemical@gmail.com)

Radhika Jhaveri is a political science major with an interest in environmental and socio-political issues. She has been a part of the Save Aarey Movement and is currently volunteering with an environmental communications collective Let India Breathe.



**Rajaraman Sundaresan** | [osr.usocial@gmail.com](mailto:osr.usocial@gmail.com)

Rajan is a student of adivasi movements and has been engaging with the question of "what is education" along with people's movements particularly in Odisha. He believes that the education system under which he was schooled has miseducated him. He believes that adivasi communities across the world have greater lessons to teach humanity which today is in deep crisis. The schooling systems, caste institutions and their embedded offshoots like family units have and continue to miseducate hundreds of generations about many important issues to life such as ecology, justice, democracy and spirituality. Read some of his thoughts and experiences on: <https://countercurrents.org/author/rajaraman-sundaresan/>



**Rakesh Rajan** | [rakesh\\_rajana@outlook.com](mailto:rakesh_rajana@outlook.com)

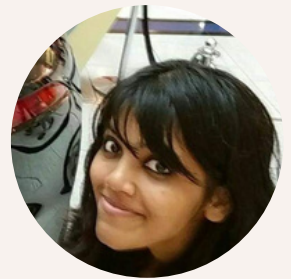
Rakesh has completed Mechanical Engineering at GEC, Kozhikode, and is currently working as Software Engineer in Kochi. He is one of the co-creators of AlterSchool, a Vayali folklore initiative. Based in Thrissur, the initiative provides alternative learning space for youth to conserve Nature, local traditions, folklores, etc. He is currently working on designing a 3-6 month River Module for educating adolescents and youth in the institutions across the river Nila, for providing awareness about the different components of Nila through alternative ways such as games and activities, etc. He is also part of TENAG - The River Tribe, a Vayali group initiative, to rejuvenate river Nila and document about the river and its tributaries using GIS mapping, etc. He has volunteered as Team Lead in Pravah ICS (International Citizen Service), a 3 month once in a lifetime Volunteering Programme by VSO (Volunteering Service Overseas) & Pravah, a Delhi based NGO (Oct 2017- Jan 2018) in a rural community in Rajasthan, which had a pool of volunteers from the UK & India. He has received Changelooms 2018-2019 (Learning & leadership for young Social Entrepreneurs to lead social change initiatives) Fellowship organised by ComMutiny - The Youth Collective & Pravah, New Delhi, representing AlterSchool, Thrissur.



**Reema Shah** | [reema.trishna22@gmail.com](mailto:reema.trishna22@gmail.com)

Reema is a confused girl who has lived a good part of her 20s trying to figure out what she wants to do. She completed her master's in psychology and then worked in the field of digital marketing with a digital marketing firm, she wasn't very happy in her job as she wanted to work in the field of environment and then she worked as an outdoor trip leader. As an outdoor trip leader she's learnt to connect with kids in a different way and taught outdoor survival skills to kids (Youreka). She teaches Spanish and is involved with the save Aarey movement.

In the Save Aarey movement she helped to coordinate the human chain in March 2020 and some events with subject matter experts to create awareness on ground. She has also worked with a fashion retail store in which she helped to promote the brand online and a sustainable hemp bag company. She has currently completed her course on field botany and as a part of her project she has conducted an ethno-botanical survey of the warli tribe in Aarey.



**Rigzin Yangdol** | [rigdzinya000@gmail.com](mailto:rigdzinya000@gmail.com)

Rigzin Yangdol works with Snow Leopard Conservancy India-Trust on the project Religion and Conservation for the past one year. She along with their education team hold workshops for the monastic community in Ladakh on the importance of local biodiversity. The project aims to explore the synergy between Buddhism and Nature, and use it to mobilise the monastic community in the efforts of environment conservation in Ladakh. Apart from it she also has co-founded an artisanal product venture called Kangla-Nyishar to promote the unique flavours of Ladakh through the use of local ingredients in their food products.



**Sammilan Shetty** | [ssbutterflypark@gmail.com](mailto:ssbutterflypark@gmail.com)

Sammilan is a conservationist and the Founder of Butterfly Park at Belvai. Sammilan was born and brought up in a village, and hence the natural instinct to conserve wildlife and nature influenced a lot in his life. His special interest for butterflies grew when he was allotted a project on "Study of local butterflies" during his graduation. Since then, he has been keenly observing these winged beauties and dedicated himself to conserve them. The Butterfly Park in Belvai which was founded in the year 2011, with the aim of conserving the butterfly fauna of Western Ghats, also creates awareness among the general public and students. The park encourages and motivates people to create and conserve natural habitat for butterflies, and other wildlife forms. His documentary film "Life of butterflies", released last season, reveals the interesting facts about butterflies and their life history. It is the country's first ever comprehensive documentary on butterflies and is appreciated by butterfly experts across the nation.



**Sarath K R** | [sarathvayali@gmail.com](mailto:sarathvayali@gmail.com)

Sarath is a folk arts enthusiast and is associated with Vayali Folklore group in multiple capacities. He has a tale to tell about his transformation from an illegal sand miner to a campaigner for rivers. His close connection with Nila river motivates him to lead multiple projects revolving around the river, mobilizing youth for social actions. Sarath facilitates 'AlterSchool', a space for contemplating social learning and to sensitize and educate children and youth in his village to work towards protecting and rejuvenating Nila river. To know more about AlterSchool, visit:

<https://alterschool.wordpress.com>



**Siddharth Agarwal** | [asid@veditum.org](mailto:asid@veditum.org)

Otherwise trained as an aerospace engineer, Siddharth currently spends most of his time collecting stories while walking across India – along rivers and lesser accessed landscapes. The years of walking have been an attempt to document and bring stories of marginalized people and the environment into the culture at large.

A significant amount of effort is spent towards river and riparian rights, as well as community building and organising. His organisation - Veditum India Foundation, attempts through different initiatives to learn about India's environment and culture at boot level, and amplify the voices of communities. The foundation offers fellowships for slow river exploration journeys, and is working on new accountability initiatives, research projects and archives.





**Sriranjini Raman** | [sriranjini.raman@gmail.com](mailto:sriranjini.raman@gmail.com)

Sriranjini Raman is an international development student. Passionate about intersectional environmental justice, she is an organizer with Fridays for Future India, a youth climate justice movement. Her current interests are Environmental Education, Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Just Recovery. Sriranjini's tryst with environmental education as a teen, led to volunteering with The Gerry Martin Project, Madras Crocodile Bank Trust, Kaigal Environmental Education Program and The Valley School, KFI. As a UNESCO World Heritage Volunteer and FSL India Volunteer, she conducted educational sessions on Waste and Sanitation for children. She is also an Ecofemme ambassador and advocates for sustainable menstrual health management sessions. At 18, Sriranjini solo backpacked across 7 states in India without flying, on a budget while practising a zero-waste lifestyle to understand and promote sustainable travelling.



**Subham Kar Chaudhuri** | [shubham477@gmail.com](mailto:shubham477@gmail.com)

Subham learnt to be a chef by profession. He started the food truck association of India when he was 21. Post which he worked with farmers for organic produce and suicidal farmers from the drought affected regions for layered poultry. He is currently working with XR Global Support in three coordination roles - Asia Regional Liaison / Global South Media Coordinator and External Coordinator of the Strategy Circle. His core is to work with agriculture and food with the impending food crisis due to the climate crisis.



**Tanmay Wagh** | [twagh.97@gmail.com](mailto:twagh.97@gmail.com)

Tanmay is a marine biologist and has carried out research in the Andaman and Nicobar islands, primarily on coral reefs, fisheries and other marine systems. His broad research interests lie in understanding the relationship between conservation, exploitation and sustainable use of marine resources. Presently, he is working as the Programme Manager of the Marine theme of the MOEFCC's Long Term Ecological Observatories (LTEO) project with Dakshin Foundation, Bangalore. Along with this, he is also carrying out research on profiling small-scale reef fisheries in the islands.



**Yash Marwah** | [yashmarwah28@gmail.com](mailto:yashmarwah28@gmail.com)

Yash is a writer and communications strategist, who visits new stories every day and tries to take them to more people. He is the co - creator of Let India Breathe, the volunteer run environmental communications collective. He believes individual action to serve the earth and its ecology is a tax we should all pay and so is organising and learning, to create public pressure on elected representatives so that anti-ecological activities don't go unabated. He is a people's person and loves pushing the limits when it comes to storytelling, especially about community-based solutions that are trying to mitigate the climate crisis.



He believes the ecological emergency could just be the turning point in the Indian society, where a network of young environmentalists could tune the political conversations to the same importance as the Indian freedom struggle and the years of emergency. Some of the initiatives he has been a part of - #ProfileForPeace, India Against Demonetization, #StudentsAgainstABVP, Save Aarey Movement etc.

**M. Yuvan** | [yuvan.aves@gmail.com](mailto:yuvan.aves@gmail.com)

Yuvan is a writer, naturalist, activist and educator. He's the author of A Naturalist's Journal and Sahi's Quest, and the recipient of the M.Krishnan Memorial Nature Writing Award. He works at the Songlines Abacus Farm School.



## Organiser Profiles

**Adil Basha** | [free2rhymeadil@gmail.com](mailto:free2rhymeadil@gmail.com)

Adil Basha has worked in publication, online and new media and outreach for sustainability initiatives for the past decade. In this time he has been a deep ecology researcher, documentary film curator, community editor and has been the Media Head at Bhoomi. He was the Assistant Editor of The Eternal Bhoomi Magazine for a couple of years. He is currently a part of the team working on Bhoomi's online modules. Adil is an ideator and deep thinker with plenty of '*blessed unrest*'. He engages with this by connecting with others and searching for alternatives for a more saner world.



**Akshit Jain** | [akshit.jain@commutiny.in](mailto:akshit.jain@commutiny.in)

Akshit Jain is an experienced team specialist with a diverse experience of working in the Development Sector and building ecosystems of and for social entrepreneurship, for over 4 years now. Akshit holds a Bachelors in Engineering from the Jamia Millia Islamia University and has been working with different stakeholders in the social sector. He aims to bridge the gap between young people trying to create an impact and experienced individuals in the sector. He believes in going an extra mile in all capacities to help young entrepreneurs achieve milestones in their journey.



**Aravind Natarajan** | [aravind.n@brmworld.org](mailto:aravind.n@brmworld.org)

Aravind Natarajan is a management student by education who worked in the corporate sector for a short stint before changing tracks to the development sector. He has been with The Blue Ribbon Movement for over 6 years and is helping build a community based of democratic values. He has a keen interest in matters related to governance, public policy and is personally working towards redefining the current scope of leadership in today's world.



**Ashik Krishnan** | [ashikkrishnank@gmail.com](mailto:ashikkrishnank@gmail.com)

Ashik Krishnan is a traveller and storyteller who enjoys cooking for his kin. He is an advocate of conversation, using words and dialogue as tools to explore real human emotions and build consciousness in a world that is turning highly transactional. Being in the domain of Education for about 7 years, he has worked with multiple stakeholders - children, youth, parents, teachers and more. He is the Co-creator of Travellers' University, where he designs and facilitates various travel based learning programs on plural themes and subjects.

Ashik enjoys editing and designing books, and dreams to pursue independent publishing. His superpowers include writing, active listening and chocolate making. Check out his occasional writings on: <https://ashikk-krishnan.medium.com>



**Kanika Sinha** | [kanika.sinha@commutiny.in](mailto:kanika.sinha@commutiny.in)

Kanika is the Convener of ComMutiny - The Youth Collective and a member of the vartaLeap Coalition; a combined ecosystem of over 200 youth engaging individuals and organisations. She has a Master's in Social Development from the University of Sussex and a Bachelor's in Psychology from Delhi University. Kanika spent many years designing and facilitating leadership experiences for young people and has mentored several youth leaders and youth-led initiatives in different parts of the country. As part of ComMutiny and vartaLeap, she is most excited about taking the discourse on youth-centric development and youth duties and rights across all sectors and to all communities.



**Kejal Savla** | [kejal@brmworld.org](mailto:kejal@brmworld.org)

Kejal is a facilitator and convenes a youth-led collective at The Blue Ribbon Movement (BRM). Kejal joined the Blue Ribbon Movement as a Fellow of the Community Connect Fellowship (CCF) in 2013, which she later started leading. CCF through its 10 batches has worked on building youth leadership through local civic action with around 400 youth. Over the years, she has been part of co-envisioning BRM's transition from an NGO to youth-led movement that re-defines leadership structures. This youth-led movement practices non-violent leadership through collective decision making.

It builds communities of alternative learning, expression, action and dialogue through different initiatives. She has been part of designing, facilitating and implementing these through circles, workshops and events. Internationally, she was selected as the youth representative of India at the World Forum for Democracy 2015, France and training program in Germany on 'Education in Crisis' by Friedrich Naumann Foundation. She has also co-organized and facilitated sessions in South Asian Youth Conference 2017- Kabul, 2018- Mumbai and 2019- Online. Kejal believes in the spirit of togetherness, to support and jointly act. She is part of diverse networks, collectives on youth and alternatives like Vikalp Sangam, VartaLeap, 2069: The Youth Fest and some others.



**Pankati Jain** | [pankati@brmworld.org](mailto:pankati@brmworld.org)

Pankati started her journey in 2018 as a fellow of civic-leadership program. Since then she has continued to volunteer with the Blue Ribbon Movement. Currently, she anchors the Community Connect Challenge which inspires young people to take civic action. She also co-anchors Partnerships Vertical of Blue Ribbon Movement. She is enthusiastic about learning and education. She co-facilitated journeys with Vimukt Shiksha Yatra on alternative education.



**Shrishtee Bajpai** | [shrishteebajpai@gmail.com](mailto:shrishteebajpai@gmail.com)

Shrishtee is a young activist- researcher and member of Kalpavriksh-environment action group. She helps in coordinating the Vikalp Sangam process that aims to weave together grassroots processes on alternatives. She also helps in coordinating a global process aimed at creating exchanges, cross-learnings, and collaborations amongst the various radical alternative and social/ecological justice movements around the world called the Global Tapestry of Alternatives. She has also helped initiate a south asian collective on rights of rivers.



**Shruti Ajit** | [shrutiajit16@gmail.com](mailto:shrutiajit16@gmail.com)

Shruti is a researcher with Kalpavriksh Environment Action Group, Pune and has been working on research and advocacy on community-based and community-led conservation aimed at democratising conservation laws and policies in India. Her interest lies in the intersectionality between ecological justice, caste, class, gender and sexualities.



**Sujatha Padmanabhan** | [sujikahalwa@gmail.com](mailto:sujikahalwa@gmail.com)

Sujatha has been a member of Kalpavriksh since 1984 and has been working full time with the organisation since 2000. She is a trained special educator and has worked with children with multiple disabilities in Delhi for 10 years prior to her move to Pune. Sujatha has been involved in developing and implementing locale-specific environment education programmes for tribal children in Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka, the cold deserts of Ladakh, Eaglenest Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh, and the district of Kachchh in Gujarat.

She currently co-coordinates the publication of fiction and non-fiction books on nature, wildlife and environment for children. Sujatha has authored some children's books on nature and wildlife published by Kalpavriksh, Eklavya and Pratham. She has also written stories for newspapers and magazines. Sujatha is part of the Vikalp Sangam team of Kalpavriksh and has been supporting its various processes and activities. She has also co-authored a case study on an alternative school for the Vikalp Sangam process. Sujatha loves being outdoors, watching birds and other creatures, and spending time in the mountains.



Some questions to reflect on:

What are the crises of the times we live in?

What is my response to the same?

What is the kind of future I envision?

What are the systems that should be in place?

What role will I play in the co-creation of these systems?

As an individual, what can I do with my community  
to build the future I want?

What values will I be guided by in this process?

This document has been compiled, edited and designed by Ashik Krishnan.  
Inputs received from Sujatha Padmanabhan and Adil Basha.

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This Vikalp Sangam was co-organised by Kalpavriksh - Environmental Action Group (<https://kalpavriksh.org>), The Blue Ribbon Movement (<https://brmworld.org>), ComMutiny - The Youth Collective (<https://commutiny.in>), The vartaLeap Coalition, Vayali (<http://vayali.org>), Travellers' University (<https://travellersuniversity.org>), and Bhoomi College (<https://bhoomicollege.org>), and financially supported by Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust.

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<https://vikalpsangam.org/about/>

