

Report on course on 'Alternative Visions for India'

Kalpavriksh organized a course titled "**Alternative Visions for India**" from the evening of **January 29, 2024, to the evening of February 1, 2024**, at The Hidden Oasis near Pune.

The course was exclusively designed (see Agenda, Index 1) for young individuals from rural or semi-rural regions of Maharashtra who work in civil society organizations dealing with various social and environmental issues, and was attended by 17 participants (see list of participants, Index 2). The sessions were conducted in Marathi and Hindi.

The main objective of the course was to provide a platform for reflection on the numerous crises that India is currently facing while enabling participants to ideate on their visions for the future. The course also aimed to focus on transformative initiatives and ideas that work towards addressing these crises, and to offer participants an opportunity to re-examine and challenge their own beliefs and ideas. Over three days, the course delved deeper into issues and transformative alternatives in the spheres of **conservation, gender, economy, and governance**.

29th January 2024

Just Being

The participants got together at 5.00 pm for an initial 'breaking the ice' session, involving a few games and activities.



30th January 2024

Introduction and context setting:

The programme began with a round of brief introductions of everyone. Then Meenal Tatapati gave a brief introduction to the overall objectives of the course.

The India I dream of

Navendu Mishra, who facilitated this session, started by asking participants to close their eyes and think about what comes to mind when they think of India. All participants then shared their responses; here are some of the imaginations:

- If offers variety of cuisines and recipes
- India a land of festivals
- India can be thought of as “mine”, not only as “ours”
- India is its constitution because it gives us rights, especially freedom of expression and equality for women
- India is its natural diversity and cultural plurality
- India is a country of ancient heritage and modern achievements
- India is its art/literature/culture/sculptors/ architecture/civilization
- India is its film industry
- India’s achievement in IT and industry
- My village, my grandparents
- Diversity of communities within villages
- Resources – water, land fertility
- India is like a tree with deep roots
- Its village economy and gram panchayats
- Its growth in science and technology
- Diversity of religions
- India is its map
- India is the different headgears
- India is its network of railways
- India is a real democracy

Navendu then asked the participants to think of how they would like to see India and to highlight the most urgent challenges or tasks ahead. Some of the following issues came up:

- India needs to be a land of peace, of happiness
- It should become an honest republic
- We need to bring a mindset of equality for a peaceful India
- We should change our mindset from “I” to “Us”
- As citizens we need to be more responsible for peaceful growth and development of the country
- We need to strengthen our secular democratic ethos
- We should allow freedom to practice our faith or atheism
- We should nurture respect for human beings
- A new language needs to evolve for development
- Let each citizen get education
- Lets remove superstition

- Survival of India as a nation is important.
- Women need to be free in their own home.
- Country should be free of patriarchy

The Polycrisis in India

Ashish Kothari introduced the session by referring to the morning's sharing by the participants and linking the discussions on Polycrisis with the challenges that they had listed. He stated that in order to understand today's challenges, we need to look at the historical context. Deconstructing the word "Polycrisis" he underlined the fact that many issues are bound with each other and we need to see the threads that link them to each other as we do not live life in separate silos as social, cultural, personal etc. We need a holistic perspective.

He mentioned some of the challenges that we face: education, unemployment, mental health, caste atrocities, deforestation, health, loss of self-worth and dignity, social media, violence, forced migration, displacement, gender inequity etc.

Taking over the baton from Ashish Kothari, Datta Desai began with a provocative question of whether there was any challenge or not. Stating that different people have different perspectives on what is a challenging situation for a nation, he sought to highlight this by sharing the context of a place that experienced famine. He began by asking what a famine means. Is it a natural occurrence or human-made? If the latter, who exactly should be held responsible! Asking the question of whether a famine resulted out of lack of development, he dwelled on the historic antecedents of the Indian economy, its integration into world economy during colonial period, the neoliberalisation of 1990s etc. He asked the question what the relationship of famine is to the economic order society accepts and its relationship to the reigning idea of development.

This was followed by a session by Deepa Pawar who spoke on issues of the marginalized, nomadic community in which she was born. After dwelling on her own biographical history of belonging to a marginalized, oppressed and criminalized nomadic tribe and its effect on her, she stressed that whatever the nature of a crisis, it affects different people differently, even those within the same family. She mentioned that there are 200 denotified tribes.

She highlighted the following salient points about Polycrisis:

- ✓ It creates situations wherein marginalized and oppressed people fight against each other;
- ✓ Polycrisis is a result of a political crisis;
- ✓ Violence is inflicted in the already disempowered to set the narrative;
- ✓ Polycrisis cannot be separated from patriarchy.

The final presentation was by Ashish Kothari on the nature of environmental crisis that humanity is facing today. He spoke about the continuity of forest governance regime from colonial to post independence time and how it had been to the detriment of forests as well as adivasi people who depend on the forest for their survival and livelihood. He referred to the struggles in the 1970s of people (Chipko/Fishworkers) and the gains to people's movements (only to be reversed by the adoption to neoliberal paradigms of development in the 1990s and which has led to large scale displacement, forest decimation). He stressed the point that unless we understand the social, political and

economic framework and context of the current crisis, we cannot solve the different crises that we face.

After the above presentations, the participants broke into small groups to discuss the nature of Polycrisis vis-à-vis their own lived reality. Following issues were thrown up during their discussions (this is indicative list):

- Education system is not free of caste system and students are divided along caste and religious lines. Focus on male child while girls are not encouraged to study;
- Amongst the sugarcane labour force, exploitation, sexual harassment, illegal abortions, endemic poverty are rampant;
- There is inequitable water distribution amongst cities and villages and water is given to cities at the expense of rural needs. There is increasing dependence on bore well;
- Stress on commercial crops is leading soil despoliation;
- Water, forest and land is no longer under the control of indigenous people;
- Politicians are intimidating people who protests for land rights;
- Medicinal herbs are getting lost;
- Land alienation is leading to private fencing;
- Freedom to ask questions of mainstream politicians is being curtailed.

31ST January 2024

Reflections from Day 2



The first session began with a recap of the 1st day. Participants identified the following moments/ideas that had impressed upon their minds in the discussions so far.

- They like exploring the idea of India;
- Learning about issue that fellow-participants faced;
- Learning about different perspectives w.r.t the Polycrisis we face today and how they are connected;
- Appreciating the need to connect the head and the heart;
- Appreciating the need for a historical perspective;
- Appreciating the need for gender perspective.

Towards a Just and Sustainable world

The above session was followed by a presentation made by Ashish Kothari on the VikalpSangam process and its background. He described on ground positive initiatives such as the DDS, homestays in Ladakh, Alt media, Alt education. He spoke about the “Spheres of Transformation” and its various elements.

Spheres of Transformation: Gender

The next session was on gender equity and anchored by Deepa Pawar. In her presentation she brought attention to the following points

- Ensuring gender justice should be the necessary core value aspiration to resolving present day crisis;
- There is a need to reframe the question of gender and identity based struggles within the context and framework of today’s policy crisis;
- Gender and identity crisis is about processes that demand – Actual participation, actual representation and actual leadership.

Following the above presentations she gave small story based exercises to the participants. With respect to each of the story the participants were expected to seek answers to the following 3 questions

1. What politics of discrimination do you see in the story?
2. What institutions promote the discrimination that you see in the story?
3. Do you see an alternative within the environment of the story?

This was followed by presentation by participants on the story they were asked to analyse.

Spheres of Transformation: Solidarity Economies

The next session was on the idea of “Solidarity Economy”. The introduction to this session was done by MilindWani, who spoke about the importance of understanding the problems and limitations of the current system of capitalism. He touched upon issues of exploitation, socialization of losses, labour alienation, centralized decision-making, its capital intensity, production of surplus unwanted commodities etc. This was followed by a talk by Ashim Roy about the alternative to it which the cooperative model presents which bases itself on the values of human solidarity. He discussed the example of Amul India. He also spoke about the limited success of this model so far and how these limitations might be overcome. At the end of the discussion Ashim Roy asked the participants to link their understanding to their current practice and try to seek answers to the following two questions:

1. How do you scale-up beyond your organization or group through economic activity based on principles of solidarity?
2. What other “values” do you expect in such economic activity?

Finding the flow within

The last session for the day was facilitated by Radhika Mulay, where she encouraged participants to explore body movement through space, and made interesting linkages to river systems and water flows and spoke of anthropocentrism in art forms. She got participants to observe outdoors any element in nature and try to depict its movement. There was a lot of appreciation for the session, with many saying that this was the first session of this kind that they were a part of.

1st February 2024

Reflections from Day 3

The day began with a game based on 4 cards consisting of red, blue, yellow and green. The participants were given 1 card and each colour in the card represented a particular question such as

- What is one new thing you learned in the last three days?
- What is one thing you will apply in your work?
- What is one experience you will cherish from the workshop?
- Who is that one person you have made friends with in this course?

Each participant answered the question and then asked to throw an imaginary ball to another participant who then responded based on the color of their card.

Spheres of Transformation: Governance

The above was followed by a session on Governance. This was facilitated by Akshay Chettri, assisted by Ashish Kothari. The session began with the screening of a song "Gaon Chodana nahi (We will not leave our village). Following points/questions were brought to the attention of the participants.

Governance can be viewed in multiple ways:

- In terms of representations
- In terms of model adopted (for e.g. Cooperative model)
- In terms of levels – Village, taluka, District etc

How do we distinguish between good and bad governance?

Is there a common idea of governance? What are the systems/principles that stand for good governance? Following answers were offered by the participants:

- Participation and accountability
- Representations (minorities, women, caste)
- Accessibility to platform/spaces of participation
- Democratic principle
- Transparency
- Collective responsibility
- Enviro-cultural-economic collaboration
- Effectiveness
- Consent and consensus
- Equality of opportunities
- Capacity empowerment of individual

In this context the following examples were discussed

- Korchi Maha Gramsabha was discussed by Vinod (Aamhi Amchya Arogya Saathi)

- Goba / Yulpa system in Ladakh by Ashish Kothari
- Principles of governance by Akshay Chetri

This was followed by an activity where the participants worked in two groups; each group was presented a case study: Governance system for revival of a degraded forest and the second was on strengthening gender participation in the Goba system.

Spheres of Transformation: Conservation

The final thematic session was on Conservation.

Meenal Tatapati started it by asking participants what comes to their mind when they think of the word 'Conservation'. Participants wrote down their thoughts on post-its which were gathered together on chart paper. Responses included Human-wildlife coexistence, biodiversity, nature, forests.

Meenal then shared the historical background of current conservation practices. She showed how colonial approaches and laws and policies of conservation influenced current ones. She elaborated on how current laws are used to criminalize and relocate tribals from their ancestral land in the name of conservation. Then to address this historical injustice, the FRA 2006 came in to force. Under this law, local communities can apply to get rights to protect and manage their forest resource.

This presentation was followed by an exercise the participants did in groups. 2 case studies were shared and the groups had to discuss the on-ground situation guided by the two questions below

Group 1: Tourism in Protected areas:

Group 2: Grasslands are fenced by FD in Kashmir:

Questions: 1) What are the consequences communities face

2) What are the Alternatives on this?



Reflections on the course and way forward

The final session was one of feedback on the course by participants.

- 1) Gained a broad perspective about Alternatives, Nature and different ecosystems. Need to work together and will seek help from KV
- 2) Forest and other perspectives have been sharpened.
- 3) Group activities helped a lot in understanding
- 4) New experiences from the trainings. New ideas and experiences about environment. Gender equity session helped in gaining different type of knowledge. When we go back to our villages, we will discuss and use it in our work. Need support from each other.
- 5) Liked and sharpened my understanding about the poly crisis; also liked The India I dream of session. Helped in getting information about the work of different organizations.
- 6) Understand lot of things like Maha gramsabha, Environment conservation
- 7) Learnt a lot. Learnt from the dance forms by Radhika. Time management of the course was very good. All things are as per the time.
- 8) Was afraid about the language of the course. But I was wrong as language is not the barrier. Understand things very clear. I am planning to try to do all the things in my work and felt I can do it. Gain positive thinking from this course.
- 9) Community feeling developed in the training. Was afraid about the course and language before but it broke my fear. Liked Radhika's session. Sessions were very lively and without boredom. I am taking back joy and energy from this. I will connect with all in future.
- 10) All activities were participatory. Increased confidence to speak in public.
- 11) Meeting place is very good and calm. Meeting and experiencing new people. Become recharged as a social worker. It helps us to be familiar with each other's work and get some good friends.
- 12) Kalpavriksh was new for me. There were lots of questions before coming here. I very much like the way KV's management team shared the same dormitories with us and they did not stay in special rooms. We will be connecting with NGOs working on the issues of sugarcane cutters and try to connect them with the different government department and schemes.
- 13) It was a homely feeling here. Met new friends. Got opportunity to connect with KV.
- 14) I like the session on Dream about Bharat. Got a different perspective to look at Dance form in Radhika's session. Every session was very good and we were listened to all mesmerizingly. Can we have a follow up workshop after 5-6 months? Lodging and food arrangement was very good.

The suggestion of a follow up course will have to be discussed internally in Kalpavriksh to see the feasibility. The day ended with Kalpavriksh members thanking the staff of the venue, the facilitators and the participants.



ALTERNATIVE VISIONS FOR INDIA AGENDA

29TH January-1stFebruary 2024

INDEX 2: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATION

1. Gaurav Kumar Chaturvedi, Chaitanya
2. Parvata Vanghare, Kalpavriksh
3. Subhash Yaman Dolas, Kalpavriksh
4. Ashwini M Labde, Independent
5. Sugandha Nilkanth Shidam, Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi
6. Vinod Deoram Bhoyar, Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi
7. Darshana Yashwant Sahare, Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi
8. Savan Kishan Jondhale, Sankalp Manav Vikas Sanstha
9. Latika Mansing Rajput, Narmada Bachao Andolan-Narmada Navnirman Abhiyan
10. Madhav Batesing Pawara, Narmada Navnirman Abhiyaan
11. Dipa Pravin Waghmare, Mahila use tod kaamagaar sanghatana makam
12. Archana Sudhir Sabhadinde, Makaam
13. Alka Sharad Pachpute, Mahila use tod kaamagaar sanghatana makam
14. Shalu Jagdish Kolhe, Foundation for Economic and Ecological Development (FEED)
15. Sarita Dudhram Meshram, Foundation for Economic and Ecological Development (FEED)
16. Omkar Uttam Kundekar, Ranmanus Foundation

17. Shamal Baliram Sherkar, Sanklp Manv Vikas Sanstha