

India's 2024 Election Results Should Spur a Renewed Movement Towards Justice, Equity, and Sustainability

Statement by Vikalp Sangam General Assembly*

7 July 2024

The results of India's 2024 national elections have been widely commented on. From the perspective of the members of the Vikalp Sangam General Assembly (listed below), which represent a wide section of the country's regions and peoples, these results are a sign that Indian democracy is alive, kicking and maturing. The politics of hate and divisiveness has failed to sway the electorate, and instead, many other substantive issues such as livelihoods and jobs, inflation, and welfare have come back to the fore. After ten years of single party majority, people of India also voted for a stronger opposition this time, hopefully ushering in an era of greater government accountability.

In this scenario, we would like to stress the following:

1. With substantial numbers in Parliament, we hope that the Opposition parties will:
 - be alert to any further subversion of due democratic procedures;
 - press for repeal of some regressive laws passed using undemocratic means in the last few years including the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Act, and the three new criminal laws, to name a few;
 - bring pressing substantive issues for debate in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha;
 - create and protect spaces for peaceful dissent by citizens; and
 - be open to submissions from the public on issues to be raised.
2. Given the widespread public discontent that election results indicate, we hope the coalition in power will move towards responsible and inclusive governance. It should:
 - Urgently deal with the unemployment and underemployment crises, including through greater incentivization of MSMEs, dignified jobs for youth, renewed focus on MNREGS and a similar law/scheme for urban areas;
 - scrupulously follow the full processes and norms of the Parliament;
 - revive the independence of Constitutional agencies and other independent institutions;
 - stop intimidation of or inducements to the media so it can once again be free and unbiased;
 - stop intimidation/inducements to Opposition MPs to defect;
 - open up spaces for public participation in all forums of decision-making including peaceful dissent, and immediately release those falsely jailed using laws like UAPA;
 - provide further powers to rural and urban local bodies to help them achieve full self-governance;
 - take back regressive legal and policy steps that have further endangered India's ecological security, such as changes to forest and biodiversity laws, and to environmental clearance procedures;

- repeal or amend laws and legal provisions that enable the government to arbitrarily harass, arrest or intimidate those who dissent or raise democratic voices, or target particular sections of society, including UAPA, CAA, and the three new criminal laws;
 - withdraw policies and measures favouring a few corporations that have enabled them to violate or sidestep environmental and labour laws, and stop privatisation of public sector enterprises or services;
 - urgently deal with worsening wealth and income inequality, including a progressive taxation system which would enable a welfare system supporting the vulnerable, curbing monopolies, and steps to arrest runaway inflation in prices of essential commodities.
3. We urge all political parties, as also civil society organisations and institutions of self-governance at village and city levels, to take the steps necessary to undo the enormous damage done by campaigns promoting religious, ethnic and other forms of division and hatred; instead, to promote co-existence and mutual respect, forums of dialogue to resolve disputes, and the many syncretic traditions India is known for.
 4. We also urge all concerned organisations and institutions in government and civil society to focus on creating dignified livelihoods, promoting food security and sovereignty for those facing hunger and malnutrition, localized self-reliance for other basic needs like water, energy, housing, sanitation, transportation, health and education, and adaptation to the impacts of the climate crisis.
 5. The above should be integrated with full decentralization of decision-making powers to rural and urban bodies of self-governance, including in financial and legal matters. There should also be a focus on recovering and sustaining the commons (land, water, natural ecosystems, knowledge) against the privatization that has prevailed over the last few decades.
 6. We urge also that allocations under government schemes for Dalits, Adivasis, and other vulnerable sections should be proportionate to their population, as per the NITI Ayog guidelines of April 2018. This should include allocations to eliminate manual scavenging completely.

As organisations, movements and networks of communities and civil society spread across India, we also commit to taking whatever actions that are within our power, to promote social justice, economic equality, direct democracy, cultural diversity and ecological sustainability towards true Swaraj. In particular, we commit to steps enabling and supporting the most marginalized sections of society, to gain dignity and equal space. We also commit to supporting communities to achieve local rural and urban self-governance in the spirit of the slogan emanating from Adivasis in central India – “our government in the centre and state, while we are the government in our village”. We extend our commitment to the non-human species that inhabit India along with us, respecting their right to thrive.

We would like to draw attention to the ‘People’s Manifesto for a Just, Equitable, and Sustainable India’, that we had issued in December 2023. This contains detailed

recommendations on actions for all the above-mentioned issues and others. The Manifesto is available at: <https://vikalpsangam.org/article/vikalp-sangam-general-assembly-to-release-peoples-manifesto-2024/>.

* The Vikalp Sangam process is a platform to bring together movements, groups and individuals working on just, equitable and sustainable pathways to human and ecological well-being. It rejects the current model of development and the structures of inequality and injustice underlying it, and searches for alternatives in practice and vision. Over 85 movements and organisations around the country are members of its General Assembly, as listed at the end of this document. For more information: www.vikalpsangam.org/about/

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Members of Vikalp Sangam General Assembly

Action for Community Organisation,
Rehabilitation and Development (ACCORD)
AGRAGAMEE
Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture
(ASHA)
Alternative Law Forum (ALF)
Bhoomi College
Blue Ribbon Movement (BRM)
Centre for Education and Documentation (CED)
Centre for Environment Education (CEE)
Centre for Financial Accountability (CFA)
Centre for Pastoralism
Chetna
CGnet Swara
Dakshin Foundation
Deccan Development Society (DDS)
Deer Park
Development Alternatives (DA)
Desert Resource Centre (DRC)
Dhaatri Trust
Dharamitra
Ektha
Equitable Tourism Options (EQUATIONS)
Forest Rights Coalition - JK
Fridays for Future – India
Gene Campaign
Goonj
Greenpeace India
Ideosync Media Combine
Inner Climate Academy (ICA)
Margshala Foundation
Jagori Rural
Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP)

Kalpavriksh
Kriti Team
Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO)
Let India Breathe (LIB)
Local Futures
Maadhyaam
Maati
Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM)
Mahalir Association for Literacy Awareness and
Rights (MALAR)
Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)
Movement for Advancing Understanding of
Sustainability and Mutuality (MAUSAM)
National Alliance of Peoples' Movements
(NAPM),
National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights
(NCDHR)
National Coalition for Natural Farming (NCNF)
National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW)
Nirangal Charitable Trust
Non-timber Forest Produce Exchange (NTFP-E)
North East Network (NEN)
Organic Farmers Market (OFM)
People's Resource Centre (PRC)
Peoples' Science Institute (PSI)
reStore
Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network (RRA)
Rythu Swarajya Vedika
Sambhaavnaa
Foundation for Economic and Ecological
Development (FEED)
Sahjeevan
Sahodaya Trust

Sangat
School for Democracy
School for Rural Development and Environment
(SRDE)
Shikshantar
Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (SLC-IT)
Sikkim Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association
Social Entrepreneurship Association (SEA)
Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem
Management (SOPPECOM)
South Asian Dialogue on Ecological Democracy
(SADED)/ Harit Swaraaj Samvaad
The Himalaya Collective

Titli Trust
Travellers' University
Tribal Health Initiative (THI)
URMUL Seemant Samiti
Watershed Support Services and Activities
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