

Vikalp Sangam Meeting on Alternatives  
Peace–Justice-Wellbeing  
Deer Park Institute - Bir Himachal Pradesh (18-10-19 to 20-10-19):

A Vikalp Sangam (Alternative Confluence) was held at the Deer Park Center in Bir (Himachal Pradesh) from 18-20<sup>th</sup> October 2019. The Sangam was a collaborative initiative between Pipal Tree (Bangalore, Karnataka), Deer Park Institute (Bir, Himachal Pradesh), Social Entrepreneurship Association (Auroville, Tamil Nadu) and Kalpavriksh (Pune, Maharashtra). Kalpavriksh is an environment action group working on issues related to environmental justice and systemic alternatives. Pipal Tree attempts to create a symbiosis of the personal, the social and the ecological that leads to sustainable development practices. Social Entrepreneurship Association is a social start-up incubator focusing on early-stage changemakers based in Auroville. Deer Park Institute is a centre for the study of classical Indian wisdom traditions and it is a project under Siddhartha's Intent Society established by Venerable Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche who belongs to the order of Tibetan Buddhism.

As the world hurtles towards greater ecological devastation, inequalities, and social conflicts, and climate crisis, 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 process initiated by Kalpavriksh in order to create a platform for dialogue, sharing and networking for various stakeholders, communities, individuals and thinkers who are striving to create ecologically sustainable, decentralized, local, democratic and humane alternatives to the current model of development which is at the root of the problems mentioned above. Now this process consists of individuals from varied background and who form the backbone of this platform. Out of this process has emerged a framework note which tries to capture and articulate a vision for a better and Just World. This framework note has emerged through a collaborative effort of hundreds of participants in the Vikalp process and is an evolving document. Some of the principles (that would be constitutive elements of a better world) that have emerged out of this process are ecological wisdom, integrity and resilience, social wellbeing and justice, direct and delegated democracy, economic democracy and cultural diversity and knowledge democracy (See <http://www.vikalpsangam.org/about/the-search-for-alternatives-key-aspects-and-principles/>).

The focus of the Vikalp Sangam held at Bir was Peace, Wellbeing and Justice. It saw the participation of 35 individuals from various walks of life from across India. The group comprised of academics, development workers, social entrepreneurs, students, social and corporate consultants, IT professionals, school administrators, spiritual practitioners and thinkers and young children along with Deer Park staff.

Milind Wani of Kalpavriksh (Milind hereafter) opened the discussion with an introduction to Vikalp Sangam, the purpose of the meeting, and the choice and evolution of the participant list.

The Format of the meeting was free flowing discussion. In fact the first half of the first day was dedicated to discussions on how to make the most of this precious time together on an issue so close to each one's heart. The organizers had felt that in order to have a fruitful and inclusive discussion it was necessary to have some common understanding amongst all the participants as to what constitutes a healthy dialogue that allows for respectful sharing, listening and acknowledging of differences. It was also felt that such a common understanding should not be thrust from above as so many rules to be followed by participants but should emerge from an initial discussion amongst the participants in a democratic **Dialogue on Dialogue** so that all the participants could understand their responsibilities towards fostering a fruitful and enriching discussion and also own up the dialogic process over the next two days. The Vikalp Sangam was structured thus by the organizers:

After the initial introduction (to the Vikalp process, and participants) the first session entitled "Dialogue on Dialogue" would draw the ground rules for healthy discussions over next three days (as explained above). Thereafter the focused Vikalp Sangam discussions on Peace, Justice and Wellbeing" would begin. The first topic to be taken up would be peace, followed by justice and wellbeing respectively. Each session would informally be moderated by any volunteer. Given below are the proceedings of the discussions that went on over the next two days.

### **The role of Hope in addressing issues of peace, justice and wellbeing**

It was felt that in the context of the various challenges that were besetting humanity – be it the apparent inevitability of climate collapse, or the rise of right-wing forces across the globe, it was difficult to imagine or talk about peace, justice and wellbeing. In such a seemingly hopeless scenario it was even more important that humanity hold on to a sense of hope. Hence it was felt that any discussion on possibilities of peace, justice and wellbeing should also include the question of hope in the context of the climate crisis and rise of religious and cultural fundamentalism.

## **Peace in the context of Climate Change:**

The meeting began with an attempt at understanding the notion of Peace, in the context of Climate Change.

The groups' unanimous thoughts were that like in the case of any thought or decision making process one should start by going inward in contemplation about what Peace, Justice and Wellbeing means to us individually, how do we as individuals experience it and what speech and action cause it and are a result of it.

Most agreed that with 'right action', climate change can be reversed. Quick, rigorous and effective strategies both at the individual and collective level, undertaken with compassion and wisdom can help people overcome their ignorance of the crisis and take action in the right direction.

However the call to action requires that we maintain an attitude of 'Nishkam Karma' that is, 'effort without attachment to the results', as the impact of our actions may take a long time to become visible and may appear only as drops in the ocean. Also, we will need to be mindful, ethical and moral in our thoughts and act with compassion as we educate, address and assist both sides, the climate change refugees on one end and those we perceive as responsible for the crisis on the other side.

So, whether we create new technology for individuals or communities, or use innovation and Bio-mimicry in our solutions or volunteer in disaster relief and promote mitigation we should give out our best to show we care, and as humans visualize our planet earth as a living organism as well.

Individually, we need to 'think before we leap', that is, be mindful of the intention and wholeness of the information we broadcast, and understand the impact it will generate. We need to choose the narratives we engage with, giving ourselves and others the space to contemplate and reflect, connect with nature, understand the impact of doing and not doing the 'right thing'. By questioning the various 'isms', especially consumerism, and also by questioning the ideologies of excess production and competition, by questioning the 'American lifestyle' and the 200 year old colonial norms and industrial era education system, we can start small, with adopting a simple indigenous lifestyle, while promoting balanced aspirations. Emerging technology innovations and mindful use of information resources like Tesla's zero energy and the live simply-movement as espoused by organizations such as the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives give us hope to find far reaching solutions to the climate crisis.

Governance systems and policies like the PESA or Forest Rights Act<sup>1</sup> give us hope as they decentralize power and give the right to indigenous people to continue with subsistence farming on shared sacred groves that promote peace and ecological balance.

As parents and educators we also have the onus to create time, space and the culture for the youth to spend more time with themselves in silent reflection. The objective being, to help them build their agency, their individual sovereignty, to find meaning, faith and purpose and live their life with the 'right view'<sup>2</sup>, with an underlying ethos of 'sharing' and co-existing in peace and harmony.

We need to engage the millennials and Gen Z to make informed decisions about their lifestyle as they are often confused between excess or lack, due to mindless media promotion and rising aspirations at one end of the spectrum and paranoid awareness of these issues on the other end. We can help them by creating bits of information as historically researched, carefully selected narratives that can be useful for the youth to make the 'right decision' between 'need and value', 'aspiration and fear'. With the right use of technology we can create a network of wisdom sharing.

Humanity has survived 6 cycles of climate change in the last three million years, as per paleo-climatology. We can overcome the current crisis too if people come together, cooperate and move ahead with plans based on faith, compassion and mindfulness.

### **Peace in the context of Cultural and Religious Conflict:**

The focus here was the question 'Where does hope come from', given the present day cultural and religious conflicts?'

Some believe hope comes from the resilience of the human spirit, and faith in magical outcomes. Some feel the external 'mess' we see around us is just a reflection of our inner reality, 'As Within, So Without, As above, So below'. Each one of us has a responsibility to change our inner world. Esoterically speaking, one participant, while referring to Buddhist cosmology mentioned that Padmasambhava

---

1 Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 or PESA, a law enacted by the Government of India to ensure self-governance through traditional Gram Sabhas for people living in the Scheduled Areas of India.

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, is a key piece of forest legislation passed in India on 18 December 2006. It has also been called the Forest Rights Act, the Tribal Rights Act, the Tribal Bill, and the Tribal Land Act.

<sup>2</sup> Because some of the participants were students of Buddhism, this term was used inadvertently. The term 'right view' has been borrowed from the eight-fold noble path that the Buddha propounded and one of its aspects involved having a 'right view'. Here it can simply be understood as the perspective captured in the alternative framework note.

says, 'this world is the creation of the collective karma of the past sentient beings', so we have all created this mess, with our greed, anger, ignorance, etc.

One participant said that we in India can get hope from legal interventions like the PESA and Forest Rights Acts. We can also get it from the Indigenous way of life where they work with nature and its resources, instinctively using traditional wisdom to know what the forests want from them and claiming that the forests know what the humans and animals want from it. Similarly we need to call for a stake in local governance, starting with small steps, with an aim to improve value creation, balance aspirations as we envision and live sacred lives.

Some felt that stilling our minds into silence, to contemplate, to reflect on the climate crisis gives us hope. Our education system and way of work life encourages business, so that we constantly have a need to do something all the time. This does not allow us space for mindful, inward looking action. Also, since most of us learn science and engineering, most often what we do without this contemplation can be destructive.

Faith in this unknown larger than life purpose or knowledge of enlightened beings like Jesus, Buddha and Prophet Mohammed can also give some of us hope. This is transcendental and goes beyond fear and the power to do something as humans. Maybe the millennials will evolve faster than us, have the emotional and spiritual maturity to be enlightened. This gives hope to some and the need to create a network of wisdom and understanding on the social media. A participant mentioned the people of the Bahai faith, who believe 'the Earth is one country and we are its citizens', so one earth and one citizenship may not be a distant dream. For some, even globalization gives hope, yet they are aware that the same globalization is also causing anxiety and despondency in the youth. In this context it was imperative that we can help by enhancing individual sovereignty thus giving the youth an individual agency, the most ancient and everlasting tool - enabling wisdom and compassion through sharing the stories of spiritual traditions, for example, that of the 14 year old Sant Dnyaneswar, who prayed, 'may there be forests of good people, may everyone have what makes them happy'. Thus it was imperative to create this network of wisdom for the youth, where we share the issues in a way that we educate them with all options available to them, e.g. Solar and Nuclear energy, Medicine and Meditation, Tesla's zero point energy and electricity in its present form.

Others felt it was important to invoke the traditional way of looking at the earth as a living organism, with nadis, chakras and bindus. The meridians of the body are akin to the energy meridians of the universe and galaxy. So if we visualize the earth as this living entity and apply positive prayer and action aligned to this visualization, it will give us strength to remain hopeful. The felt that 200 years of colonization and conquests should not impel us to lose our way of living and thinking as a secular nation and tradition. Today we are the product of our times and we live in a world of

information and cognitive overload. We need to create space to engage with the voice within us instead of engaging with the external noise and information all the time.

Revisiting peace w.r.t. climate change led to the discussion of climate refugee or climate immigrants. The Rohingya and Syria case shows that the conflict effects of climate change are already with us ushering in economic, political and social unrest, leading to additional conflicts around the world. Climate change is being referred to as a 'threat multiplier'. For some, centre point energy, the wisdom of emptiness within, or the emptiness 'wuji' in the centre of circle gives hope. Understanding this and the fact that polarization arises from within, gives hope to some. The idea of individual sovereignty and agency gives some people - the hope we need to reverse conflict and climate change. To achieve this we need to question the many 'isms'. As long as we resonate with any 'ism' like nationalism etc. we make an external factor responsible for the havoc. Out of fear we outsource our problems to these external saviours, giving rise to the real life alpha males like Trump, Modi, Ram Rahim Singh, Asaram bapu, etc. or giving youth the unrealistic and fictional icons of external saviours and super-heroes.

On the second day (19/10/2019) the group continued the discussion on peace w.r.t to cultural and religious conflict, as it discussed how Brexit and the wall of Mexico are examples of the push-pull factors that will affect Peace, jobs, investments, and eventually peaceful co-existence.

The group started discussion with the current issues of National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the threat of religious polarity thus aggravating the existing problem of trans-generational trauma and pushing humanity away from peaceful co-existence. This led to a discussion on the perception of trauma and how the politicians and polarisers are misusing and misleading the ignorant, vulnerable population into a seize mentality and promoting and creating further conflict and unrest. It was felt that to tackle this issue and achieve the common goal of peace-justice-wellbeing for all, we need to address trans-generational trauma in the context of our history and current policies and systems that lead to or promote inequality. As we proceed to discuss, sensitize and meet people on common ground with a certain faith, we must apply compassion, wisdom and fair communication. We must review the practices with respect to the policies and put them in context of our constitution which stands for the JUSTICE, social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the 2 [unity and integrity of the Nation].

Many felt that given the current radicalization and almost fascist nature of our sovereign State, India, we as activists may want to adopt the Gandhian way of activism, nonviolent actions that influence numerous anti-government resistance movements. One participant gave the example that during the 2002 Gujarat pogrom a Gandhian professor went to live with and spend time with the affected Muslim

community and would sweep their streets to show solidarity and humility. Thus it was felt that as parents, teachers, citizens, we can pick the role of situational and sustainable leadership. We can focus on creating, building and promoting fair, wise and compassionate narratives about current and historical events, linked judgements and trauma that will diffuse radicalization and enhance critical thinking. We can become mindful and choose the narratives going around carefully unveiling the truth behind harmful propaganda and noise, by listening compassionately, knowing as the Buddhists would that there is a continuity of consciousness in rebirth and therefore we are in some way accountable and responsible for correction of our past ignorant, unmindful and often harmful effects of speech and action. At all times being careful to use terms that can be otherwise marketed as political propaganda. The example of Karwan-e-Mohabbat - a people's campaign for solidarity and conscience that reaches out to survivors of hate crimes was discussed. This initiative proved that sometimes just acknowledging the pain and listening deeply creates a safe space where change and transformation starts to happen.

The big question is, what is the common thread running across these continuing conflicts causing unrest, increasing the divide, leading humanity and its resources to extinction? What is this Principal Contradiction? What is this elephant in the room? Some felt it was the system of capitalism, while others felt that it was the politics of Identity. Ethnic identity connects individuals through perceived common past experiences and expectations of shared future ones. Identity is concerned with group judgments and judgments about groups and their motives.

The psycho-cultural interpretation of this trans-generational trauma we are discussing is possibly a shared, deeply held view found in group narratives leading to the current crisis of polarization. This conflict or resistance to co-exist in peace is the psycho-cultural drama, where groups are competing over apparently irresolvable issues, claiming and engaging in the trauma as the central element of the groups historical experience, and polarizing events whose manifest content involves non-negotiable cultural claims, threats, and/or rights that become important because of their connections to core metaphors and group narratives that embody a group's identity. Economic and ecological refugee are arising out of this polarized identity and ensuing psycho-cultural Drama and being given a further de-moralizing identity of climate Refugee. The unjust policies of states are in need of review in these contexts. May be new policies need to be created to help settle these immigrants; foreign and food policies need to be made inclusive for such exigencies. The basis of this re-affirmation would be to first acknowledge the horrific events we have set upon ourselves, then acknowledge the triggers that we have within us that give a face to such events. We need to as a community of nations work together across language barriers, methods and policies towards truth and reconciliation. Questions were raised as to ultimately, what should we do to overcome the current crisis to restore Peace-Justice and wellbeing for humanity? How can we as educators, parents, and responsible citizens create identities, socializations, corrections and connections in how we engage with the young minds? How do we reconcile the need for property

and its ownerships with communities that don't? How do we get to the root cause or the principal contradiction of the current crisis of fascism we face as a people? Would a common movement encouraging in a Gandhian way an alternative thinking from a place of wholeness help? Would embracing multiple identities based on what we choose to do, help us address the issue headlong yet? Can we contribute to this movement by collating relevant stories of Vikalp Sangam, linking them to historical events and policies and movements for fresh thinkers and alternatives?

### **The idea of Justice**

The second half of the second day (19.10.19) was dedicated to discussing Justice and its various elements.

The format of this discussion was to form small working groups, to discuss how people individually related to the concept of Justice. People were encouraged to focus on questions such as:

- What is Justice?
- What is the relationship between justice and history, justice and peace and justice and wellbeing?

Some of the answers that emerged out of these group discussions are enumerated below:

- Justice is equity and historic correction of inequity.
- Justice is personal and an innate human need.
- Justice is preceded by the vision and understanding of the society where its functions are called upon as being necessary for maintaining social order. Whenever the balance in a society is impacted, restoring it back to its envisioned state is Justice.
- It is a process of governance, crime and punishment from the perspective of the community and is context specific.
- The sites of Justice could be public courts or private homes within family.
- It has a notion of identities, construed or real as much as it has a history of the past, creating a present and a reflection on the future.

The presentation of the above led to a more free flowing discussion on the challenges humanity faces in pursuit of justice. Some of these have been summarized below:

Justice is based on a framework of the state, like the constitution of India. Justice then becomes a mechanism to conform to the ideology of that society and often assumptions made get limited by certain subscriptions or set of values. Justice is a product of an economic system, laws are defined separately, and hence there is a bias in justice.

For justice to be effective, it has to be personal, since justice or injustice is felt personally as an experience, by an individual. The Indian constitution assures its citizens justice, equality and liberty, and endeavours to promote fraternity. Can and should this be translated to individual values like inner balance required for peace and wellbeing? How can an individual's worth be equated, how do we guarantee that individuals experiences certain rights, liberties, natural justice as personal.

While the principles of natural justice concern procedural fairness and ensure a fair decision is reached by an objective decision maker some of the questions are, is the decision maker equipped to go beyond the wheel of ignorance and fairly measure an individual's moral worth? Is he able to link the external secular values that have shaken the inner spiritual ideology of the individual in question? Can the law and justice system evaluate the individuals balance between his biological, natural and inner spiritual need?

### **Justice in the context of Peace**

Peace again is very personal, like justice and wellbeing. If 'I' feel justice has been done to me, 'I' will be at peace, yet, how do I experience peace because of external elements becomes very personal.

Justice should include a concept of equity and nature. Given the current climate crisis, nature needs to be brought into the framework of an enlightened and just society, to ensure we replenish resources in proportion to how much we use.

Justice for an envisioned society should have engrained principles of:

1. Equity
2. Reciprocity
3. Respect
4. Trust
5. Harmony
6. Balance

### **Justice is Restorative and Regenerative**

Restorative justice can lead to transformation of people, relationships and communities. The principle of restorative justice is: Crime causes harm and justice should focus on repairing that harm. The people most affected by the crime should be able to participate in its resolution.

Regenerative justice is the coupling of restorative justice with the notion of generative justice, which involves the explicit and intentional discovery and building of life meanings, as well as the consideration of the relationships that those meanings have with wrongdoing and 'making things right'.

Historically, Justice was Dharma, nuanced yet profound and capacious, encompassing the philosophy of nature.

### **Justice in the context of Alternatives**

The idea of justice is to restore the natural balance and harmony that has been tipped, in this context the current laws of crime and punishment could do with better alternatives. Bringing in the discussion of positive and natural laws, it was felt that we possibly need to include an indigenous justice paradigm into our system (such as the laws based on the holistic philosophy of the aboriginal inhabitants of North America.) The holistic philosophy is a circle of justice that connects everyone involved with a problem or conflict on a continuum, with everyone focused on the same centre. The centre of the circle represents the underlying issues that need to be resolved to attain peace and harmony for the individuals and the community. The continuum represents the entire process, from disclosure of problems, to discussion and resolution, to making amends and restoring relationships. The methods used are based on concepts of restorative and reparative justice and the principles of healing and living in harmony with all beings and with nature.

Restorative principles refer to the mending process for renewal of damaged personal and communal relationships. The victim is the focal point, and the goal is to heal and renew the victim's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. It also involves deliberate acts by the offender to regain dignity and trust, and to return to a healthy physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual state. These are necessary for the offender and victim to save face and to restore personal and communal harmony.

It was felt that as a group we can start with personal commitments, to improve our critical thinking and humaneness. We could take up existing policies like the Forest Rights Act, PESA or projects like revitalizing Rivers policies that can help indigenous groups in implementation of these through our actions as a group. A question was also raised as to how we can get politicians and policy makers involved?

### **Wellbeing**

The post dinner session on 19.10.19 saw tentative forays into the notion of peace. This was then continued into the last day of the Vikalp Sangam until lunch time.

Some of the questions/issue that were raised included what are the constituents of wellbeing? Is growth of an economy indicative of wellbeing? Can material measure of growth be considered as a factor for wellbeing? This kind of growth only increases the divide between the rich and the poor. Prevention in medical care is cheaper than

expenditure, yet we have insurance for medical care. The modern world is built on a cycle of consumerism-industrialization-consumerism. So how do we prevent 'non-wellbeing'? Raise taxes on Junk food, Cigarettes, and anything else that is harmful for the human being and nature.

One participant felt that we need more of Robert Kennedy's who in the face of a storm, just after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr, delivered a speech encouraging the people to replace violence with empathy, understanding, compassion and love.

The question was raised as to what wellbeing means to each of us? For some sharing, a feeling of freedom, love, and dignity improves the quality of life, while engaging in economic production is a way of giving up freedom of choice, Subsistence farming is a better way of living for them. For others the value of free time, is wellbeing. It's the time spent constructively to go inwards and contemplate, and spend rational amount of time working for sustenance and is contradictory to stereotype phrases we have grown on like 'Time is Money'.

One participant asked if there is an individual or community framework that we can design for our own wellbeing or that of the community we live in? What would we include here? What are the causes of wellbeing? Is it meaningful relationships? Is it finding a deeper purpose and meaning in how we choose to spend our time both in leisure and professionally? Research shows that engaging in social movements improves wellbeing.

The group agreed that our own wellbeing becomes very important, because if we have despair and fatigue in our hearts, we create further distance from others. We need someone we can talk to from our heart - a friend, family, coach, someone who has our wellbeing and best interest in their hearts. Many people report their loving relationship with nature helps them ward of loneliness and despair. We need to constantly work on ourselves to revitalize our hearts and minds through some daily practice of reflection and being with nature. We can periodically attend meditation retreats to remain mindfully generous, focussed and resilient amidst all the chaos. We can then extend this understanding, kindness and compassion towards our families, loved ones and community. We need to follow the middle path and not view personal work and professional work through the same lens of extremes. This can lead to economic despair and activism burnout. We should recognize and work with bright spots that are present everywhere, instead of allowing society to atomize us.

Some participants stressed that we need to think of how we connect to self, others and nature. How is our sense of belonging or non-loneliness fulfilled, Are we working with movement and other aspects of our human bodies, are we working with nature? Loneliness and mental health is growing in urban India, and it has a far-reaching cost attached to it. How are we closing the lacuna of polarization, communal/class divisions? Can we create a new society within the old world, using the process of mindfulness?

A participant referred to the example of Costa Rica. According to the Happy Planet Index, HPI, Costa Rica has got things like sustainability, democracy and education right. Seventy years ago, Costa Rica did away with the army. Allowing for many things, like investing in education to strengthen its human talent and wellbeing. It generates more than 99% of its electricity from renewable sources, with the vast majority from hydroelectric dams. The Costa Rican government has used taxes collected on the sale of fossil fuels to pay for the protection of forests and have recovered 30% more of forest coverage since the 80's, combating climate change, sustainably.

### **Final remarks**

During the final session of the Vikalp Sangam meet on Peace-Justice and wellbeing, some of the Key issues discussed as the possible indicators of principal contradictions were, fear, material growth imperative of the current model of development, regressive right-wing political process and policies.

Personal strategies were discussed about overcoming fear. Some said, we should welcome these changes with 'hope', others decided we could take a Gandhian vow to be fearless. To counter the fear, we need awareness, start with acknowledging it, befriending it, accepting it, confronting it and eventually addressing it. Our wellbeing requires us to have space for reflection and open spaces where we can have open discussions without fear of judgement, allowing us to look for and/or create inspiring narratives. We need to create spaces for acceptance and ownership and finally move into an awareness of confluence, away from colonization and atomization.

As for the issue of growth Imperative, many felt that at a personal level we can choose to live differently, change our lifestyle to consume less and more mindfully. We can use indigenous wisdom; some of the aboriginal spaces are offering new ways of living well. We can be more mindful as to what we eat, change how we commute, where, how and when we go for vacations. How we use our waste. How we use energy, when and for how long, how can we save on this? How we use water, when, why and for how long, how can we save on this? Is the onus only on the consumer? Or is there a political process driving the production? If this is true, we need to tackle the process and policy in question. These are some of the questions that need to be seriously thought about at an individual as well as at a social and community level.

Lastly, it was agreed that in order to overcome hurdle of in existing systems, or create alternative systems, we need to work with both consciousness and awareness. We have often seen columnists writing intellectually about these issues and doing little on ground, while the spiritual guru's and politicians are manipulating the masses to make them do what they want done. No mass movement has ever been successful without the 'right view' strategy and 'right action of wisdom and compassion', and a conscious and aware leadership. We can start with engaging and taking an active role in existing systems like PESA and Forest Rights Acts, and pooling our resources with existing activists. We can start by creating study circles and alternative schools to inculcate the 'right view'.

-----End of report-----

## **Proceeding of Vikalp Sangam Peace–Justice-Wellbeing**

### **Deer Park Institute - Bir Himachal Pradesh**

#### **18/10/2019 – Day 1 – Dialogue-on-Dialogue**

**Naveen Vasudevan (hereafter Naveen)** of SEA moderated the session, opened the floor for discussion by asking the question 'what is Debate, Discussion and Dialogue?'

Shashank Chaturvedi who is an Asst. Prof at the Department of Political Science of Indraprastha College for Women (University of Delhi) was of the opinion that it could mean the same as the Hindi terms Vad, Vivad and Vitand. While Supreme Court lawyer Naresh Mathur thought the Hindi words Tarak (logic) and Samvad would be more aligned to the term discussion.

Touching upon the issue of how to handle disagreements in a dialogic process **Milind Wani** (hereafter Milind) of Kalpavriksh wondered if the real question/ on concern for a healthy dialogue was that it should not be reduced to an exercise in mutual placating where differences arise in order to make it a feel good meeting? How will we face painful questions? The issue according to him was how will we honestly take a position and work on what we believe in?

**Dr. Ron Colman** (alias Tashi) who formerly worked with the Bhutanese government on the issue of Gross National Happiness said, that a debate should be done with an aim of Samvad (discussion directed towards developing a common understanding), where everyone knows and abides by the rules of the debate.

While some were of the opinion that we should build a consensus towards those things that 'I' loves to listen to, while taking cognizance of opposing contention be dealt in the spirit of Samvad.

Others said we should focus on what is being said.

**Preeti** Mann (hereafter Preeti) of QYON Retreat program that works towards bringing a transformation in thought, intent and action for a more compassionate and just world spoke about different types of discussion techniques, and clarified that in a debate we 'listen to speak', and in a dialogue we 'listen to understand'.

**Naveen** talked of engaging with each-other that would require attitudes of *sakala* - listening with all our faculties, *sahrudaya*-listening with the heart and *Samvadam*- a dialogically.

The group then discussed how, contemplation and the space around us, which is our external environment impacts the result of a debate.

The Methodology for Dialogue on dialogue during the 3 day discussion on Peace-Justice-Wellbeing was decided to be such that, we took back actionable to be shared in our own spaces, while we allowed for uninhibited expression in our collective space at Deer Park, Bir.

The principles that emerged out of this session were:

1. Start and end the discussion by laying down a common ground
2. Create time for contemplation, take break of one minute silence every 20 minutes or so of discussion
3. Allow interventions that promote willingness of participants to listen deeply

To achieve the above mentioned objectives, we, as a group decided the methodology that we would follow for the next 3 days would be:

1. Set objectives and expectations before each discussion,
  - a. why are we here,
  - b. what do we wish to take away from this discussion, and
  - c. How best to 'share experiences'
2. Moderators were to ensure that thematic boundaries are maintained, within a three minute timeline.
3. In order to decide that all get an equal chance to speak, the moderator would decide who will speak based on his observation of frequency with which each one participate speak and intervene.
4. Moderator could ask if anyone wanted to add to the issue before moving onto the next topic/issue.

5. People who were quiet for long periods would be encouraged to speak up.
6. Anyone could disagree and raise blind spots; however one must adhere to the given template to speak up: That is quote the speaker whose point one wishes to respond to, and then initiate the dialogue with reference to context and state the reason for his/her disagreement clearly
7. Summary of the previous day's work were to be discussed before the next session, setting the ground for further discussion.
8. A periodic, one minute break, ensured time for contemplation every 20mins or so, or at a logical break in discussion, whichever was later.
9. Encourage people to use systems thinking during the dialogue on dialogue on Peace, Justice and Wellbeing, with the hope to transcend problem statements.
10. It was decided that past Vikalp Sangam topics and documents could be used as reference and examples where applicable.
11. We would keep a suggestion register so that people could request for 'other' interventions and ideas.
12. The proposed topics for discussion would be Global warming, Grief, Pain, Climate Change.

With the rules of the game laid out, the team of 35 ground soldiers marched forward, with 'hope' in their hearts to dialogue on Peace, Justice and Wellbeing.

The text below is the first hand account of this discussion. We hope to create further confluence of thoughts, ideas and practices, please join us and promote us in anyway useful to yourself and humanity in general. We thank you for sharing this reading space with us.

### **18/10/2019 – Day 1 – PEACE:**

**Siddhartha** from fireflies moderated the session on Peace. He said that peace is not possible without Hope. If this is the case, then one should also ask what makes hope possible, for example, in reference to issues related to Climate justice.

In the context of planetary crisis due to Methane released due to Permafrost and its possible ecological impacts and the possible social strife this could lead to he asked 'Is there Hope' for peace? And if there is hope how do we perceive it? How could people are hand this crisis? And what can we individually and as a VS group present here do about it? He suggested that any discussion on such topic needs to begin with a serious contemplation of the situation as an inward journey of reflection is required to be taken, in order to correctly reflect on these issues. Only then can we come up with some answers for ourselves in the form of speech and action. He likened this to the example of archery, where the first step to shooting the arrow outwards (any action) to a target involves, involves first pulling the arrow backward

(an inward journey of contemplation and reflection), and this is in direct proportion to the distance (impact of our action) it has to be launched forward.

So, while some people follow an ostrich approach of denying the seriousness of the problem and some are nihilistic about it, there are many people out there, who like us are discussing the issue with a belief that Climate crisis can be mitigated and eventually reversed. There are stronger voices like that of Greta Thunberg, Jane Fonda, religious leaders like Pope Francis and HH Dalai Lama and other climate change activists who are already working on the issue. Even amongst us we have the Deer Park, Fireflies, Kalpavriksh team, Sangeetha Sriram, a resident participant of Auroville, and some other participant are doing some work on how to embrace this pain and deal with the crisis.

He also sought to ground the discussion by adding that whatever the action, the thumb rule to work on climate change should be, an 'attitude of Nishkam Karma', that is action without attachment to the result as has been taught in the Bhagwad Geeta. This sense of detachment is required as otherwise we can get discouraged to think that whatever we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. Besides this our actions also have to be guided by ethical and moral thoughts as we will need to act with compassion towards both, the climate refugee as much as with those we believe are responsible for this crisis.

Siddhartha reminded us that solidarity in immediate action directed towards disaster relief operations, will require selfless volunteers who can give their best to show we care as humans.

Barry Rodriguez (Barry hereafter) who teaches the newly emerged discipline of "Big History" added that, contemplation and human resilience is the foundation for Peace, Justice and Wellbeing, and should be the core of our thoughts and actions individually and as a group. He said that to begin with we should visualize the earth as a living organism, and whether we create new technology for individuals or communities, or innovation using Bio-mimicry or other human and non-human designs, we need to be mindful, moral and ethical to bring about any constructive change for the planet earth.

**Saurabh Mittal** (Saurabh hereafter) of QYON (a social enterprise dedicated to harnessing the curiosity of children) added, that some of the actions we as an urban community can take are, reject consumerism, and question the 'American lifestyle' where 80% resources are used by 20% people, and move towards balanced aspirations, as is the case in developing nations and communities. He referred to the website: [storyofstuff.org](http://storyofstuff.org), asking people to visit it.

**Ankur Panday** (Ankur hereafter) who does workshops on bodywork said that introspection on these issues might take us to a point where we question and then

break the yoke 200 years of colonial norms and lifestyle that we blindly follow today. We might want to adopt and promote simpler indigenous lifestyles and education systems.

Tashi added to this the point that the current education system promotes competition and industrialization. He also suggested that we could all read and draw on ideas we want from a book called 'Being **Different:: An Indian Challenge To Western Universalism**' by Rajiv Malhotra, and the movie **THRIVE: What On Earth Will It Take?** By Foster Gamble.

**Antonella Simonelli Mathur, (Antonella hereafter)** a former Italian diplomat who has now settled in India and is a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism added that she saw hope in the possibility of finding solutions to the climate crisis in the already available information in the cosmos through the possibility of contact with other with extraterrestrial civilizations that are awaiting humanity's peaceful response to their presence, and referenced the website on the disclosure project <https://siriusdisclosure.com/> and the 2017 documentary on the same topic entitled 'Unacknowledged', streaming on Netflix. She also referred to the innovation of technology such as zero point energy by Tesla as promoted by Dr. Steven Greer. She also referred to technical concepts like energy of the torus shape<sup>3</sup> and its centre, the energy of the centre of a circle in forest dwellers, etc. Referring to Buddhist cosmology, she quoted Padmasambhava also known as Guru Rinpoche, was an 8th-century Buddhist master from the Indian subcontinent as saying that the world is a creation of collective karma of the past sentient beings. So, effectively we have all created the current crisis with our greed, anger and ignorance. Thus each of us has a responsibility to change our inner world in order to change the world outside. She added that "the Abrahamic religions encourage people to do good so that they go to heaven, they don't say that one should 'do good' so that there is a reversal to Climate change."

Sachin Sachdeva (Sachin hereafter) who works with the Paul Hamlin Foundation said that he sees hope in supporting existing systems and policies like the 1996 Panchayat Extension (to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) or 2006 Forest Rights Act that encourage traditional and indigenous way of living, farming and education. **Yoga practitioner and young social activist Gurnam Singh** (Gurnam hereafter) said he feels hopeful, when he is engaged in some spiritual practice that promotes inner work, like yoga. He added that there are deeper issues the current generation faces. They are born into a world of mindless consumerism promoted by irresponsible media, an aspirational mindset and a debilitating technology. Their awareness of the history that has created the current crisis is often incomplete. The millennials are

---

<sup>3</sup> The group did not get into the details of these concepts. These were merely mentioned in the passing. However for those interested some links and information has been provided in the text below as well in a footnote.

therefore confused, and unable to draw a distinction between polar values like greed versus value, aspiration versus need, etc. thus confusing them and often numbing their faculties to take mindful decisions.

To **Gurnam's** observations Ashish Kumar (hereafter Ashish) founder of Sahaj Foundation which works in the field of education added that he therefore thinks that the onus, thus lies on us to train ourselves and groups of people we influence to go within and spend more time with ourselves in silence, contemplating, and doing nothing (i.e. avoiding mindless busyness, not mindful action). This according to him will help in creating and allowing an environment of peace, faith and purpose while we also give us space to educate and drive ourselves to doing the right thing

**Neema** Pathak Broome (Neema hereafter) of Kalpavriksh added that human sovereignty is where individual's agency lies, and so our individual and collective approach should be to promote power sharing, decentralizing centres of power, encourage questioning the ideology of any 'ism', be that of a political or a religious nature. She also stressed on the wise use technology to create a network for wisdom sharing at one level and building networks with initiatives working for systemic alternative like 'extinction rebellion'.

**Milind** sees hope in the human potential for spiritual realization and emotional maturity and wondered how this can be harnessed for faster evolution of humanity as a whole. He pointed to the very existence in human history of prophets, philosophers and spiritual masters like the Buddha, Muhammad and Christ as a divine signal that humankind and the sentient cosmos was driven by teleology of meaning and purpose. Giving reference to the vast philosophical traditions in the east and the west – or the great visionaries and political leaders of the past who have time and again provided guidance and directions to humanity in order to save it from the brink of extinction, it was he said, difficult to not be hopeful as we will have to draw upon the rich legacy of our ancestors - understanding, assimilating and creating a network of this ancient wisdom is the way forward.

Taking the above point further, **Anil Thampi (hereafter Anil)**, an IT consultant working with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) referred to the wisdom of the Bahai faith, which considers earth to be a single country and therefore we are all its 'one citizens'. **Globalization** is causing anxiety and despondency in the millennials. He further quoted Sant Dnyaneswar (IAST: Jñāneśvar), also referred to as Jnaneshwar, Jnanadeva, Dnyandev or Mauli (1275–1296)[2][3] was a 13th-century Indian Marathi saint, poet, philosopher and yogi of the Nath Vaishnava tradition from Maharashtra, who prayed "may there be forests of good people and may everyone have what makes them happy."

Giving the discussion a mathematical dimension **Alex Jenson (Alex hereafter)** who works in Ladakh for and NGO called Local Futures, added that we need to make

use of the Boolean function of 'AND' more than the 'OR' when we talk of solutions forward. For instance we should take the best from the ancient and modern wisdom.

**Naresh** went on to add that he saw hope in innovation and technology. Referring to the zero point energy<sup>4</sup> (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zero-point\\_energy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zero-point_energy)) the torus energy<sup>5</sup> (see <https://www.mindmovies.com/blogroll/toroidal-energetic-field-what-tha>) he mentioned the research on how these can be stored as energy for use forever; how can these be the sustainable sources of energy. He also referred to director Kimberly Carter Gamble's movie 'Thrive: What on earth will it take'. "An unconventional documentary that lifts the veil on what's really going on in our world by following the money upstream - uncovering the global consolidation of power in nearly every aspect of our lives. Weaving together breakthroughs in science, consciousness and activism, THRIVE offers real solutions, empowering us with unprecedented and bold strategies for reclaiming our lives and our future." He talked of Ancient Indian, Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese wisdom that believes earth to be a living organism with Nadi's, Chakras and Bindus. It is further believed that we are connected by the elements, energy structure and flow, to all human and non-human forms, at a cellular and physical level. Keeping this in mind **Naresh** went on to quote the interview of His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama about cancer research at Men-Tsee-Khang, the Tibetan Medical and Astro-science (See [institutehttps://www.men-tsee-khang.org/.](https://www.men-tsee-khang.org/)) Cancer survivors were encouraged to 'not' see their organs as external subjective reality and therefore the disease was not an external reality alone, it was also subjectively created and when this concept was used alongside medicine, the results of recovery were better. He encouraged us to extend this visualization to the earth, our lifestyle and to the culture of the past 200 years of colonial repression that we have absorbed as our subjective reality, and think of practices we can go back to in our traditional and wiser and more sophisticated way of living.

Shifting gears, **Preeti** said we are a product of our times and we live in a world of information and cognitive overload. We have to be careful and create space in our lives to listen to the voice within instead of the noise from our external world.

Drawing our attention back to the central crisis of our time, **Alex** encouraged us to draw a link between peace, justice and climate crisis. Bringing to our attention that:

1. Each degree of rise in temperature will cause a ten percent decrease in food yield.

---

<sup>4</sup>**Zero-point energy** (ZPE) is the lowest possible **energy** that a quantum mechanical system may have. Unlike in classical mechanics, quantum systems constantly fluctuate in their lowest **energy** state as described by the Heisenberg uncertainty principle.

<sup>5</sup>The **torus** is said to define the workings of consciousness, such as consciousness having geometry. The **energy** of this **torus** is constantly refreshing and influencing itself.

2. It is ethically incumbent upon us to question our existing systems of governance and its strength to survive climate change issues like mass migration.

Taking the point further, **Tashi** added that the Syrian civil war started because of drought and referenced the eBook 'Syrian Civil War' by Thomas Thompson. He went on to quote Greta Thunberg, who says she wants to see action and not just hope, .Pointing to the fact that 20% people contribute to 66% of the greenhouse emissions. Tashi felt that one way of answering Greta's call for action could be a boycott of consumerism and non-cooperation of capitalism,

**Naveen** was of the opinion that polarities lie within us and we need to resolve them. It is not merely the question of the individual or the system or the inner against the outer. These are artificial polarities that need to be overcome.

**Sachin** was of the opinion that if we outsource our problems, we give away our sense of agency to something supernatural, outside us, like the superman and Harry Potters of the modern times, leaving us feeling helpless, unable to take action. This is because fighting against the 'image' of avatar is akin to creating the alpha male, like Modi, Trump, Ravi Shankar ,etc.- the messiah and saviours of the world.

Instead he recommends that a concrete response to call for action lies in working towards:

- a. Sharing power
- b. Decentralizing of power
- c. Bringing agency back into the system

**Saurabh** agreed with Sachin and also encouraged us to additionally question 'ism' of any kind because when we resonate with any 'ism', we make an external factor responsible for the havoc and chaos we face.

**Neema** responded to this by referring to Dzongsar Rinpoche's statement that we should 'fear the external saviour'. Because many want a personal king to support them, as is being seen all over the world of right wing politics. According to her, we need to understand that real power, strength and creativity, our agency lies within, in individual sovereignty. We need to question politicians like George Bush who say that the American lifestyle is not up for debate, and we also need to question the 20% of the world population that is responsible for creating 66% of the greenhouse emissions and therefore the climate crisis.

At this juncture Saurabh gave a reference to the 'Story of Oil' and 'Story of Plastic' available at <https://storyofstuff.org/> a project that started with a 20 minute online movie to a movement five years and 40 million views later.

**Barry** said, In order to have lasting peace, faith should be linked with compassion and mindfulness and he also brought home the fact that the earth has survived 6 cycles of climate change in the last three million years, as per paleoclimatology. This gives us hope that we can overcome the current crisis too if people come together, co-operate and move ahead with plans based on faith, compassion and mindfulness.

*This lead to the discussion of Peace with respect to Cultural and Religious Conflict:*

The question we tried to address was what are the avenues of 'hope' given the present day cultural and religious conflicts?

**Preeti** believes hope comes from the resilience of the human spirit, and faith in magical outcomes in this particular context.

While **Saurabh** believes individual and collective moral, ethical action and innovation can bring about constructive change as a community.

**Naresh** quoted one of the seven principles of Hermes Trismegistus, author of Hermetic Corpus. As within, so without, as above, so below, the group discussed how the external mess that we see around us is possibly a reflection of what we are feeling within ourselves.

Some of the work we all do is so iatrogenic<sup>6</sup> that it is not only destroying us, but destroying our habitat also. Some examples discussed were:

**Antonella** said, the Corporates are using the book 'The Secret' by Rhonda Byrne to improve productivity which in turn leads to higher individual consumption and hence more overall consumerism. On the other hand we could be more mindful and collectively use such resources with responsibility and accountability.

Usually this happens because we don't view our world as sacred, nor visualize the earth as a living organism. We can all embrace the Indigenous attitude, where the sacred lies within and embrace this as our new prayer – to discover the sacredness within. We often hear people disrespectfully refer to 'soil' as 'dirt' and 'forests' as 'woods'.

**Ankur** said, we should break away from the norm. Question, why we wear suits, speak and behave in a certain way?

**Gurnam** said we get hope when we evaluate our need with respect to value creation or Inner work with respect to a different external life to be envisioned, e.g., if the youth did not see life from a sequential, consumerist perspective, then the life they envision or the value they create will be reflected in terms of peace etc....

Taking the point of value creation further, **Neema** said that in India we have a few legislations that look at Climate change, where the community can take charge of the

---

<sup>6</sup>Relating to illness caused by medical examination or treatment. Medical Definition of **iatrogenic**. : induced inadvertently by a physician or surgeon or by medical treatment or diagnostic procedures

land resources. Can we help and aide these projects? We in India get hope from the PESA, Forest Rights Acts and the Indigenous tribe's way of life. Where they work with nature and its resources, instinctively knowing what the forests want from them and claiming that the forest knows what the humans and animals want from it. Similarly we need to call for a stake in local governance, starting with small steps, with an aim to improve value creation, balance aspirations as we envision and live sacred lives.

Again touching upon the theme of mindless busyness that takes us away from what is actually of value (peace) **Ashish** said by stilling our minds into silence, to contemplate, to reflect on the climate crisis might give us hope. Our education system and way of work life encourages business, so that we constantly have a need to do something all the time. This does not allow us space for mindful, inward looking action. Also, since most of us learn science and engineering, most often what we do without this contemplation can be destructive.

**Milind** was of the opinion that a larger than life purpose or knowledge or avatars like Jesus, Prophet Mohammed give some of hope too. This is transcendental and goes beyond fear and the power to do something as humans. Maybe the millennia's will evolve faster than us, have the emotional and spiritual maturity to be enlightened. This potentiality gives us hope and the need to create a network of wisdom and understanding on the social media. Like the Bahai faith, whose practitioners believe that 'the Earth is one country and we are its citizens', so one earth and one citizenship may not be a distant dream. Globalization gives us this hope, yet the same globalization is causing anxiety and despondency in the youth. We can help them by enhancing Individual sovereignty thus giving them the agency, the most ancient and everlasting tool enabling wisdom and compassion. Like sharing the stories of gurus like the 14 year old Sant Dnyaneswar, who prayed, 'may there be forests of good people, may everyone have what makes them happy'. Let's create this network of wisdom for the youth, where we share the issues in a way that we educate them with all options available to them, e.g. Solar and Nuclear energy, Medicine and Meditation, Tesla's zero point energy and electricity in its present form.

**Naresh spoke** about the traditional way of looking at the torus earth as a living organism, with nadi's, chakras and bindus. The meridians of the body are akin to the energy meridians of the universe and galaxy. So if we visualize the earth as this living entity and apply positive prayer and action aligned to this visualization, it gives us hope. –For e.g. there are seven 'chakras'. The first is the 'muladhara', the root chakra, which is the link in each person with 'mulaprakriti', with Mother Nature. This chakra is located at the base of the spine, and so it is understood that at the base of the spine we are all related to the physical web of the universe. The whole universe as we know it, from the atom to the star, is a web of interdependent energies, and our physical bodies are part of that web of energies. At the 'muladhara' we are linked with all the energies of the universe. As that chakra opens we become aware of this

energy. Ancient people lived much more from the muladhara. They were immersed in the physical universe. This was a limitation to some extent and they had to grow out of it, but we have grown so far out of it that we have lost consciousness of it. We now have to recover that deep physical consciousness, consciousness of matter and of our integration in the material world. So we have to allow the muladhara to open and become activated.” - referencing the book ‘*A New Vision of Reality (Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith)*’ by Bede Griffiths, he said that 200 years of colonization and conquests should not impel us to lose our sophisticated way of living and thinking as a secular nation and tradition.

**Alex** sought to ground the discussion with a pragmatic revisiting of the relationship of peace w.r.t to climate change, especially in the context of the impending issues of climate refugee or climate immigrants.

**Tashi** added that the Rohingya and Syrian case shows that the conflict effects of climate change are already with us, ushering in economic, political and social unrest, leading to additional conflicts around the world. Climate change is being referred to as a ‘threat multiplier’. Ref ‘Years of Living Dangerously’ hosted by Thomas Friedman. This calls for large scale action, not just hope, as called out by ‘Greta Thunberg’. Refer ‘extinction rebellion’ the ‘XR’ call for action.9+6

**Sachin, Naveen and Saurabh** talked about the centre point energy, the wisdom of emptiness within, or the emptiness ‘wuji’ in the centre of circle gives hope. Understanding this and the fact that polarization arises from within, gives me hope. Refer the book ‘Practicing the Tao Ti Ching: 81 steps on the way’, by Solala Towler.

Individual Sovereignty and Agency gives some people the hope we need to reverse Conflict and Climate change. To achieve this we need to question the ‘isms’. As long as we resonate with any ‘ism’ like nationalism etc. we make an external factor responsible for the havoc. Out of fear we outsource our problems to these external saviours, giving rise to the real life alpha males like Trump, Modi, Ram Rahim Singh, Asaram babu etc. or giving youth the external saviours in the Superman’s and Harry Potter’s of the world.

On day two, the 19/10/2019 the discussion on Peace continued, with **Siddhartha** moderating the discussion on peace with respect to cultural and religious conflict.

**Sachin** discussed how Brexit and the wall of Mexico are examples of push-pull factors that will affect jobs, investments, peace and eventually peaceful co-existence.

The discussion veered towards the issue of National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the inevitable religious polarization that this will cause while enhancing the existing problem of trans-generational trauma and pushing humanity away from peaceful co-existence.

Thereafter there was a discussion about how the politicians and polarisers are misusing and misleading the ignorant, vulnerable population into a seize mentality and promoting and creating further conflict and unrest. To tackle this issue and

achieve the common goal of peace-justice-wellbeing for all, we need to address trans-generational trauma in the context of our history and current policies and systems that lead to or promote inequality. As we proceed to discuss, sensitize and meet people on common ground with a certain faith, we must apply a critical element of compassion, wisdom and fair communication. We must review the practices with respect to the policies and put them in context of our constitution which stands for the JUSTICE, social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the 2 [unity and integrity of the Nation].

**Antonella** suggested that given the current radicalization, and the almost fascist nature of our sovereign state, we as activists may want to adopt the Gandhian way of activism, nonviolent actions that influence numerous anti-government resistance movements. E.g. During the 2002 Gujarat pogrom a Gandhian professor went to live with and spend time with the affected Muslim community and would sweep their streets to show solidarity and humility.

**Preeti** said that as parents, teachers, citizens, we can pick the role of situational and sustainable leadership. We can focus on creating, building and promoting fair, wise and compassionate narratives about current and historical events, diffuse radicalization and enhance critical thinking. We can become mindful and choose the narratives going around carefully unveiling the truth behind harmful propaganda and noise, listening compassionately, knowing as the Buddhists would that there is a continuity of consciousness in rebirth and therefore we are in some way accountable and responsible for correction of our past ignorant, unmindful and often harmful effects of speech and action. At all times being careful to use terms that can be marketed as political propaganda.

At this juncture Siddhartha gave the example of the Karwan-e-Mohabbat initiative by people of conscience like Harsh Mander - a people's campaign for solidarity and conscience that reaches out to survivors of hate crimes. Sometimes just acknowledging the pain and listening deeply creates a safe space where change and transformation starts to happen.

**Ankur** said that we need to search for an answer to the big question - what is the common thread running across these continuing conflicts causing unrest, increasing the divide, leading humanity and its resources to extinction? What is this principal Contradiction? What is this elephant in the room? At this point **Shashank, John and Neema** how the principal contradiction of our times seemed to be the issue of Identity. Ethnic identity connects individuals through perceived common past experiences and expectations of shared future ones. Identity is concerned with group judgments and judgments about groups and their motives.

Ankur, Antonella, Naveen and Naresh questioned if the Psycho-cultural interpretation of this trans-generational trauma we are discussing is possibly a

shared, deeply held view found in group narratives leading to the current crisis of polarization. This conflict or resistance to co-exist in peace is the psycho-cultural drama, where groups are competing over apparently irresolvable issues, claiming and engaging in the trauma creation whose manifest content involves non-negotiable cultural claims, threats, and/or rights that become important because of their connections to core metaphors and group narratives that embody a group's identity. On the other hand people were also bringing out creative artefacts to deal with some of the issues. References were made to the book "Good news for change: How everyday people are helping the planet, by David Suzuki and Holly Dressal and the enchanting video book-'All the colours of the Earth' by Shiela Hamanaka (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmL93MAImQ4>) that celebrates the children in our life. as well as the – educative website <https://mettacenter.org/> which is a resource for learning about bringing change in a nonviolent way )

**Alex** sought the roots of the present crisis as manifest in the economic and ecological refugee as arising out of polarized identity based struggles. To this psycho-cultural drama is creating another type of de-moralizing identity – that of Climate Refugee. These are as a result of unjust policies of states and are in need of review in these contexts. Maybe new policies need to be created to help settle these immigrants, foreign and food policies need to be made inclusive for such exigencies. The basis of this re-affirmation would be to first acknowledge the horrific events we have set upon ourselves, then acknowledge the triggers that we have within us that give an impulse to such events. We need to as a community work together across language barriers, methods and policies towards truth and reconciliation. Or do we need a revolution like the 'Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi'?

The morning discussion was summarized by **Tashi, Preeti, Milind and Azad**. They asked what needs to be done to overcome the current crisis in order to bring peace-Justice and wellbeing for humanity. How can we as educators, parents, and responsible citizens create identities, socializations, corrections and connections in how we engage with the young minds? How do we address the issue of property ownership in the context of the fact that there are many who do not own anything? How can we talk to the adivasi about NRC (National register for citizens) when apartheid continues? How do we get to the root cause or the principal contradiction of the current crisis of fascism we face as a state? Would a common social movement encouraging alternative thinking from a place of wholeness help? Would embracing multiple identities based on what we choose to do, help us address the issue headlong in a Gandhian way? Can we contribute to this movement by collating relevant stories of Vikalp Sangam, linking them to historical events and policies and movements for fresh thinkers and alternatives? Can we learn something from social psychologists like Eric Fromm, and Ashis Nandy?

## **The Post Lunch session on day 2 19-Oct-2019 was on JUSTICE**

These were presented to the larger group by representatives from each group; the floor was open to a free flowing discussion on the subject matter of justice. For the interest of coherence, this has been presented below without identifying the person speaking. What appears below is a summary of the discussion that was put together in as coherent a way as possible:

### **On the Nature of Justice**

Collectively, justice is based on a framework such the constitution of India. Justice then becomes a mechanism to conform to the ideology of that society and often assumptions made get limited by certain subscriptions or set of values. Justice however is not isolated from but is a product of an economic system and hence there is a possibility of bias towards those who are economically more powerful in justice.

For justice to be effective, it has to be experience personally as fair, since justice or injustice is felt personally as an experience, by an individual. The Indian constitution assures its citizens justice, equality and liberty, and endeavours to promote fraternity. Can and should this be translated to individual values like inner balance required for peace and wellbeing? How can an individual's worth be equated, how do we guarantee that individuals experiences certain rights, liberties, natural justice as personal.

While the principles of natural justice concern procedural fairness and work towards ensuring a fair decision is reached by an objective decision maker. Some of the troubling questions are, is the decision maker equipped to go beyond the wheel of ignorance and fairly measure an individual's moral worth? Is he able to link the external values that have shaken to the inner spiritual ideology of the individual in question? Can the law and justice system evaluate the individuals balance between his biological, natural and inner spiritual need? Justice is an innate human need, personal and should be ever evolving, case by case, like the British 'TORT' system or the ancient justice systems of the Mughal emperor Akbar...

Justice should include a concept of equity and nature. Given the current climate crisis, nature needs to be brought into the framework of an enlightened society, to ensure that we replenish resources in proportion to how much we use.

Justice for an enlightened society should have engrained principles of:

1. Equity
2. Reciprocity
3. Respect
4. Trust

5. Harmony
6. Balance

Historically, Justice was Dharma, nuanced yet profound and capacious. Encompassing the philosophy of nature, akin to a tree which is standing upright should thrive, and the tree that has fallen, needs to be cut.

### **Justice is Restorative and Regenerative.**

Restorative justice can lead to transformation of people, relationships and communities. The Principle of restorative justice is: Crime causes harm and justice should focus on repairing that harm. The people most affected by the crime should be able to participate in its resolution.

Regenerative justice is the coupling of restorative justice with the notion of generative justice, which involves the explicit and intentional discovery and building of life meanings, as well as the consideration of the relationships that those meanings have with wrongdoing and 'making things right'.

Reference was made to the website <http://commonstransition.org/>;

### **On the relationship between justice and Peace**

Peace again is very personal, like justice and wellbeing. If 'I' feel justice has been done to me, 'I' will be at peace, yet, how do I experience peace because of external elements becomes very personal. Thus peace, like justice is not only personal but also social.

### **Justice w.r.t (with respect to) Alternatives**

If the idea of justice is to restore the natural balance and harmony that has been tipped, in this context the current laws of crime and punishment could do with alternatives. Bringing in the discussion of positive and natural laws, we possibly need to include an indigenous justice paradigm into our system. For instance, the laws based on the holistic philosophy of the aboriginal inhabitants of North America. The holistic philosophy is a circle of justice that connects everyone involved with a problem or conflict on a continuum, with everyone focused on the same centre. The centre of the circle represents the underlying issues that need to be resolved to attain peace and harmony for the individuals and the community. The continuum represents the entire process, from disclosure of problems, to discussion and resolution, to making amends and restoring relationships. The methods used are

based on concepts of restorative and reparative justice and the principles of healing and living in harmony with all beings and with nature.

Restorative principles refer to the mending process for renewal of damaged personal/social and communal relationships. The victim(s) is the focal point, and the goal is to heal and renew the victim's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. It also involves deliberate acts by the offender to regain dignity and trust, and to return to a healthy physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual state. These are necessary for the offender and victim to save face and to restore personal and communal harmony. Reference was made to the website:  
[http://www.aidainc.net/Publications/ij\\_systems.htm](http://www.aidainc.net/Publications/ij_systems.htm)

A question was asked as to how concern for justice can be brought to the centre stage of the VS process? It was felt that perhaps, in future, we could look at the small groups within Vikalp Sangam that are already working on alternatives, ecosystems and adivasi groups or the local communities and see how we can feed/document stories under the three categories of Peace-Justice and wellbeing.

It was also felt that as individuals within a group committed to bring about a just world we can start with personal commitments, to improve our critical thinking and humaneness. Plan and act in accordance with this, at a personal level, with our groups of influence and then within the society. We could take up existing policies like the Forest Rights Act, PESA or projects like revitalizing Rivers policies that can help indigenous groups in implementation of these through our actions as a group. It is also important to think how we get politicians and policy makers involved?

An interesting offshoot of this discussion was the classic question of Technology - Can our robots be trained to deliver holistic Justice?

**WELLBEING** was touched upon in the evening post dinner session on Day 2, 19-Oct-2019

**Tashi moderated** the sessions and started with discussing what the constituents of wellbeing are. Is growth of an economy indicative of wellbeing?

If health, knowledge and sustainability is wellbeing, but, unpaid work does not account into the GDP, the measure for economic growth, should then GDP, a material measure of growth be considered as a factor for wellbeing? This kind of growth only increases the divide between the rich and the poor. He gave reference to the book 'The Great Invention' by Ehsan Masood. He further pointed to the irony that thought prevention in medical care is cheaper than expenditure, yet we have insurance for medical care. The modern world is built on a cycle of consumerism-industrialization-consumerism. So how do we prevent 'non-wellbeing'? Raise taxes on Junk food, Cigarettes, and anything else that is harmful for the human being and nature?

We need more of Robert Kennedy's who in the face of a storm, just after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr, delivered a speech encouraging the people to replace violence with empathy, understanding, compassion and love.

He then asked what wellbeing means to each of us. What is the Principal Contradiction to wellbeing?

As above the discussion was free flowing with common ideas being articulated by different individual from their own perspective. This helped unpack a concept into understanding it in a multi-dimensional manner. Given below are summaries of what was discussed:

**Neema, Anil, Chaitanya** felt that sharing, a feeling of freedom, love, and dignity improves the quality of life, while engaging in economic production is a way of giving up freedom of choice, Subsistence farming is a better way of living for them. For others the value of free time, is well being. It's the time spent constructively to go inwards and contemplate, and spend rational amount of time working for sustenance and is contradictory to stereotype phrases we have grown on like 'Time is Money'.

Is there an individual or community framework that we can design for our own wellbeing or that of the community we live in? What would we include here? What are the causes of wellbeing? Is it meaningful relationships? Is it finding a deeper purpose and meaning in how we choose to spend our time both in leisure and professionally? Research shows that engaging in social movements improves well being.

**Preeti, Naveen, Saurabh, Ashish, Anil, Madhuvanti (a student) and Neil and Alex** felt that our own wellbeing becomes very important, because if we have despair and fatigue in our hearts, we create further distance from others. We need someone we can talk to from our heart - a friend, family, coach, someone who has our wellbeing and best interest in their hearts. Many people report their loving relationship with nature helps them ward of loneliness and despair. We need to constantly work on ourselves to revitalize our hearts and minds through some daily practice of reflection and being with nature. We can periodically attend meditation retreats to remain mindfully generous, focussed and resilient amidst all the chaos. We can then extend this understanding, kindness and compassion first towards our families and loved ones and then to the community and larger society. We need to follow the middle path and not view personal work and professional work through the same lens of extremes. This can lead to economic despair and activism burnout. We should recognize and work with bright spots that are present everywhere, instead of allowing society to atomize us. The bright side of some corporate ethos institute meditation and yoga as a practice, with an aim to improve productivity, we can 'choose' to use this as personal work and benefit from it. Reference was made to book "A paradise built in Hell" by Rebecca Solnit.

**Ashish, Alex, John** urged the group to think how we might we connect to self, others and nature. How is our sense of belonging or non-loneliness fulfilled? Are we working with movement and other aspects of our human bodies? Are we working with nature? With the current welfare of the state, loneliness and mental health is growing in urban India, and it has a far-reaching cost attached to it. In this context it becomes important to ask how we are closing the lacuna created by communal polarization and socio-economic divisions created by the current model of development. Can we create a new society within the old world, using the process of mindfulness? Remembering, how do we conduct ourselves, what do I want to say? How do I want to say it? Reference was made to the book 'for the Love of the World' by Ajahn Amaro.

According to the Happy Plant Index, HPI, Costa Rica has got things like sustainability, democracy and education right. Seventy years ago, Costa Rica did away with the army. Allowing for many things, like investing in education to strengthen its human talent and wellbeing. It generates more than 99% of its electricity from renewable sources, with the vast majority from hydroelectric dams. The Costa Rican government has used taxes collected on the sale of fossil fuels to pay for the protection of forests and have recovered 30% more of forest coverage since the 80's, combating climate change, sustainably.

### **Concluding remarks**

In Conclusion of the Vikalp Sangam meet on Peace-Justice and wellbeing, some of the Key issues discussed as the possible sources of principal contradictions were, fear, material growth Imperative, regressive political process and Policies.

Personal strategies discussed to overcome fear. Some said, we should welcome these changes with 'hope', others decided we could take a Gandhian vow to be fearless. To counter the fear, we need awareness, start with acknowledging it, befriending it, accepting it, confronting it and eventually addressing it. Citing a Buddhist anecdote as to how Siddhartha confronted his own fears while meditating in a forest filled with wild animals, one participant said that we can do as the Buddha did when fear accosts us - We can learn to be mindfully aware of it as we walk, sit and sleep with it, meditate on it, feel it deeply, use it to think and re-think creative outcomes. We can use alternative healing methodologies. A reference was made to the book "When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress" by Gabor Maté

**Milind, Barry, Sachin and Siddhartha** felt that our wellbeing requires us to have space for reflection and open spaces where we can have open discussions without judgement, allowing us to look for and/or create inspiring narratives. Space for acceptance and ownership and finally move into an awareness of confluence, away from colonization and atomization.

**Neema, Ankur, Ashish** asked, how do we overcome the Growth Imperative? At a personal level we can choose to live differently, change our lifestyle to consume less and more mindfully. We can use indigenous wisdom; some of the aboriginal spaces are offering new ways of living well. For e.g. we can change what we eat, change how we commute, where, how and when we go for vacations. How we use our waste. How we use energy, when and for how long, how can we save on this? How we use water, when, why and for how long, how can we save on this? They also raised the pertinent point that the onus should not only be on the consumer but more economic and political process driving the production Thus we need to tackle the process and policy in question.

**Saurabh, Preeti** and Ankur felt tha we could build on the 'middle class' wisdom of less consumption –a new paradigm that throwing 'Capitalism out' along with its problems of ill-health, industrial education and economy as the only Growth parameter should be replaced with Indigenous, Aboriginal spaces, offering a new way forward.

To overcome hurdles and work forward within existing systems, or even to create alternative systems, we need to work with both consciousness and awareness. We have often seen columnists writing intellectually, with awareness about some of these issues we discussed, and yet doing little on ground, while the conscious guru's and politicians are manipulating the masses to make them do what they want done.

No mass movement has ever been successful without the 'right view' strategy and 'right action of wisdom and compassion', and a conscious and aware leadership. We can start with engaging and taking an active role in existing systems like PESA and Forest Rights Acts, and pooling our resources with existing activists. Also, Creating study circles and alternative schools to inculcate the 'right view'.