



Report on

Vikalp Sangam

On

Democracy

5th to 9th October, 2019

School for Democracy Campus, Bhim, Rajasthan





This report is compiled by Shrishtee Bajpai with inputs from Ashish Kothari. The illustrations in the report are done by Poorva Goel and pictures were taken by Ashish Kothari.

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Introduction

A Vikalp Sangam (Alternatives Confluence) on democracy was organised at School for Democracy in Bhim, Rajasthan from 5th to 9th of October 2019.

The Sangam was co-hosted by School for Democracy, National Alliance of Peoples' Movements, Blue Ribbon Movement, Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan, Suchna Rozgar Adhikar Abhiyan, Vrikshmitra, and Kalpavriksh.

The Sangam brought together a gathering of 75-80 activists, researchers and practitioners from across India working on issues of democracy, on ground-level initiatives, rights-based laws and policies, electoral reforms, resistance, livelihoods initiative, conservation, youth groups, and arts/media.

This was the *18th in the line of alternatives confluences¹ (and the 10th thematic one) being held across India*, with the aim of sharing experiences in creating and visioning alternatives to today's destructive model of 'development' as also to the structures of oppression, injustice and non-sustainability (capitalism, statism, casteism, patriarchy, etc). With such sharing also comes the possibility of greater resistance to such structures, more collaboration towards and visioning of creative alternatives, and more collective advocacy towards systemic change.

The Sangam witnessed stimulating discussions, a social audit hearing organised by MKSS, visit to Devdungri village where MKSS began its historic RTI journey, some fascinating sharing of grassroots examples and a lot of songs to keep the up the spirits.

Background to the Sangam

During the National Vikalp Sangam held in Udaipur in 2017, it was strongly felt that as civil society we need creative thinking and deliberation on the nature of State, the idea of democracy and with the state getting increasingly repressive and autocratic in many areas, how do we talk and propagate alternatives. Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan, Vrikshmitra and Kalpavriksh collectively proposed the idea of working towards a Vikalp Sangam on democracy in 2019.

In the process, National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM) and Blue Ribbon Movement (BRM), School for Democracy (SFD) and Suchna Rozgar Adhikar Abhiyan also joined the organising team.

A planning meeting was organised in the month of July this year at School for Democracy to roughly design the Sangam. The organising team collectively decided on below objectives to guide us through the 5-day sangam:

1. Establishing the context as to how democracy has failed in the current times
2. To build an understanding on alternative version of democracy
3. Creating space for ideologies, plurality, diversity and respect for the varied understandings and principles.

¹ Vikalp Sangam is an ongoing process of bringing together practitioners, thinkers, researchers, and others working on alternatives to currently dominant forms of economic development and political governance. It aims to create a space to come together, dream and deliberate towards an alternative future. While resistance efforts are underway, and need to be supported, we also need to create a cross sectoral platform on alternatives (or constructive work) to share, learn, build hope, and collaboration. See www.vikalpsangam.org.

4. To understand the current crises from culture standpoint and imagining on creating alternative narratives.
5. Story telling (*Loktantra ki kathayein*).
6. Exploring democracy within our own organisations, networks, collectives and institutions.
7. To do an envisioning exercise: *Mera Adarsh Gaon*

With those objectives at the background, four focus areas were decided. It was however proposed that these four focus areas will modified at the actual Sangam based on inputs from participants-

- Direct/radical democracy (power exercised by people on the ground), non-party political process
- Representative democracy (power exercised by elected/selected representatives), party politics
- Democratic governance by the state: accountability, transparency, inclusion, participation, spaces for dissent, etc
- Democracy within our own spaces, personal, social, institutional, including in our movements/civil society

Day 1, 5.10. 2019: Social- audit public hearing in Beawar

On the first day of the Sangam, a Social Audit Public Hearing was organized in Beawar, Rajasthan (Labour Department Office). Soochna Evum Rozgar Adhikar Abhiyan (SR Abhiyan) in collaboration with the Department of Labor and Employment, Government of Rajasthan has been conducting a pilot social audit of the Building and Contract Workers (BoCW) Act in 45 Wards of Beawar Nagar Parishad, Ajmer District. The Social Audit Public Hearing in Beawar was the culmination of the pilot social audits. The hearing was presided by a panel comprising representatives of the State Labor Department, State Building and other Construction Workers Board, District Administration, Legal Services Authority, IT Department and CSOs. The Panel heard the findings of the social audit and collectively decide on the action to be taken ahead for the redressal of shortcomings identified. A number of workers from the nearby area openly shared their grievances, disclosed corruption in various services, non-implementation of schemes and lack of support from the authorities. The government representatives responded to the grievances by promising time-bound redressal of all of them. The Public Hearing served as a forum for workers to register their membership with the Board, request for renewal, submission of claims and registration of grievances. The pilot audits also served as a proof of concept for the operationalization of the social audits across the State.



Vikalp Sangam participants had the chance to participate in the hearing. Most participants shared that they were very inspired by the process of open sharing of grievances and holding the administration accountable. Nikhil Dey from MKSS on the fourth day shared more details on the social auditing process and law that MKSS and SR Abhiyan had been working on (explained below in Day 4).

Day 2, 6. 10.2019: Visit to Devdungri, introductions by participants and introduction to Vikalp Sangam

The second day began with a visit to Devdungri village where the Right to Information Act movement began. Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan office is in Devdungri where the activists Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey and Shankar Singh began their journey along with others. Participants had the opportunity to know the entire story of the RTI movement from Nikhil and Shankar first hand and also be at the mud hut where all the four activists based themselves and spearheaded one of the most inspiring movements in India's history. Post the visit, all the participants were inspired, evoked and enthralled about the next few days.

In the evening, a round of introductions was made wherein the participants introduced their immediate neighbours.

Post the introductions, Ashish Kothari of Kalpavriksh shared briefly about the Vikalp Sangam with examples from across the country, highlighting principles and values emerging from the grassroots that offer a vision for the future of society. The process underlying the Sangam is to give political strength so that we have cohesive standpoints to speak at various governance levels and strongly challenge the current state of affairs.

Day 3, 7.10.2019: Current context and sharing of examples that challenge the context

First session: Current context

The third day started with a discussion on the current context in a fish-bowl method², with sharing of experiences and perspectives by Shankar Singh, Siyaram Halami, Kavita Srivastava, Sudarshan Iyengar, Sohini Shoaib, Yash Marwah, Jagannath, Shashi Panna, Kejal Salva, and Meera Sanghimitra.

Some key points that emerged from the discussions were-

- ❖ We all work in different issues, doing good work, with various communities but have we lost our own humanity, or the communities we work with, how sensitive are they to basic issues of humanity?
- ❖ The biggest challenge to democracy today is to deal with the reality of values and aspirations among us that are very narrowly defined. Economic globalization forces have captured all of us. Mob mentality has gripped many, with people looking for ways to vent their frustrations; violence has increased in hearts and in actuality.
- ❖ Do we have our own visions of justice, or equality, and of pathways to them that are not stuck in old activist ways? Also notions of what is a good life, what is the minimum needed, have changed from last generation. Early spirit of voluntarism inspired by Ambedkar, Gandhi etc, is it still present? Histories are being re-written or erased, new narratives are being written from outside, so where do

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fishbowl_\(conversation\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fishbowl_(conversation))

we anchor our work? And we know these changes cannot come overnight, but there is also the urgency of the ecological crisis.

- ❖ All institutions are increasingly in the hands of powerful: media, industries.
- ❖ Seriously increasing inequalities plague us.



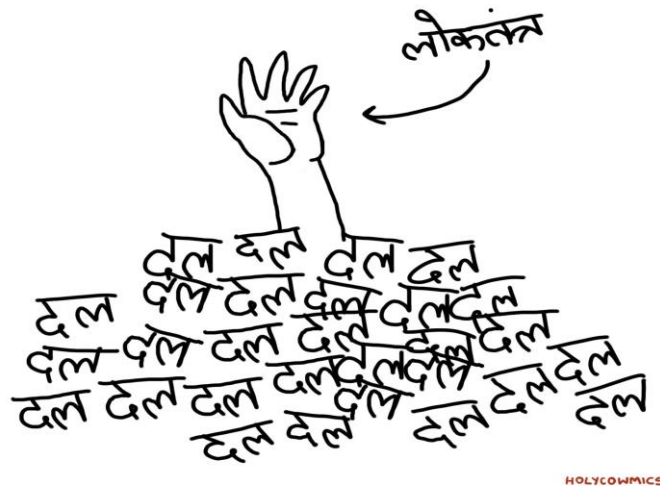
- ❖ Urgent need for widespread awareness about issues, about the importance of politics (not to hate it, but to take in directions one wants), about issues of justice and injustice, about how one needs to defend RTI and other progressive laws.
- ❖ We need to develop alternatives across sectors and so need to share skills of various kinds, without being territorial and selfish.
- ❖ At this point we need to re-assert all our basic values: humanity, brotherhood, compassion, diversity, non-partisanship, equality, inclusiveness.
- ❖ We need to make new collectives. We need to work in small groups also, go deep into issues. Big qs, what is our process, what is our methodology ... how are these immersed in the above values?

Post the discussions among the small group, it was opened up and a number of other responses also came in:

Questions:

1. *How do we traverse beyond our sectors? How we deal with compartmentalisation in our working styles?*
 2. *How as a civil society do we deal with questions of religion and belief which we have largely neglected and thereby enabled right-wing forces to take over easily?*
- ❖ Must re-examine acceptance of 'nation', what is it, who is it, and what is hidden under. Why are borders sacrosanct? Even andolans are shifting towards talking about nation. Could be 'nation-in-making' or multi-nation nation?

- ❖ How can the voice of minorities, other affected sections be heard in a system of majoritarianism? How do we deal with caste issues, religious and linguistic minority issues and gender issues in a democracy?



- ❖ In our own spaces, we need to have people representing themselves, where are the farmers, children, etc? How to spread idea of tolerance, esp through education system which does not encourage this, e.g. on issues of sexuality.
- ❖ If we are government in our own settlement, whatever the govt in Mumbai or Delhi be, then we should keep thinking of how to strengthen ourselves, and for this it is also important for all of us to know own responsibilities.
- ❖ Root of patriarchy has to be identified and tackled; the instrumentalised use of women's labour is still a reality. When women organize, they give priority to basic needs for self and family.

Second Session: Direct democracy

As with most sangams, the focus is to talk less about what's gone wrong, and more on what is emerging from the ground that is challenging what is going wrong, and providing alternatives and how these can be strengthened. The second session began with sharing of experiences from the ground trying to establish direct democracy, by Mohan Hirabai Hiralal, Devaji Tofa, Satish Gogulwar, Siyaram Halami, Suresh Chhanga, Vishram Vaghela, Milind Bokil and Rohit Prajapati. Some points that emerged during the discussions were-

- ❖ How can we work towards strengthening our collective work? Other issue is our pre-occupation with electoral politics, not going beyond this into non-party politics, which is the domain and right of every person. If we fight under the rules of those who have taken our power, half the fight is lost from the beginning.
- ❖ Devaji Tofa shared about the experiences from Medha Lekha village and how they question everything. From why everything is said to be sarkari (and are we bhikari?), to why companies are taking away their forests, lands and water. In Mendha Lekha village they study things, before taking decisions, and acting on them. Everything is subject to *adhyayan* (research). It is equally important for them that women are centrally involved in decision making.



- ❖ Siyaram Halami from Korchi, Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra shared about a federation of 90 villages called the Maha Gramsabha which is working towards conserving forest, women's voice being empowered, move towards consensus based decision-making, and localised livelihoods.
- ❖ Suresh Chhanga shared experiences from Kachchh, Gujarat on working towards self-governance and implementation of 73rd amendment. He became Sarpanch in 2017 and has been involved in organising the panchayats. Around 632 panchayats meet every 3 months to talk of 29 functions and what can be done with them and beyond, and special lecture on specific topics. They use 8 parameters and 16 tools to do governance audit of panchayats: register maintenance, any special activities in marginalized sections, does the key of the panchayat ghar remain with sarpanch, etc. And then discussion on how to remove shortcomings, what other vision for future, etc.
- ❖ Vishram Vaghela from Bhuj, Kachchh Gujarat shared about the decentralisation process initiated in Bhuj city by 5 civil society organisations on various aspects (KMVS with women, Hunnarshala on housing, Sahjeevan on environment, SETU on governance, and ACT on water). Using 74th Constitutional amendment in its full spirit (which after 26-27 years is not fully implemented anywhere in India), and going past ward committees into area committees, and ignoring the population requirement of 3 lakhs specified in constitution (which makes ward committees mandatory for such cities), they have developed programme for decentralization called Homes in the City programme.

The session triggered stimulating discussions among the participants. Some questions raised were:

1. Consensus (promoted by govt as *samras*), how will it work in patriarchal, caste-based villages, to avoid status quo?
2. Where there is casteism, how does direct democracy work? Issue of majority domination? How many more initiatives like these ones?
3. Still need a govt or regulatory framework ... esp. to regulate market, corporations, etc. What provisions are needed to enable this to happen in which all people can take part? And what decisions at what level? And for many areas, PESA implementation is a dream unless overall political structures also change.

4. How much are marginalized sections really in power? Even when in SC as sarpanch, does not remain so as it rotates.
5. Need to think in terms of eco-regional planning and beyond the idea of nation-state?

Mohan Hirabai Hiralal specially responded on the idea of consensus based decision making

It is not consensus if any decision is being taken under duress, fear, or bribing. One step towards sarva-sahmati is also sarvaanumati, where two contending parties say ok lets try something out and then see. In Mendha also a long process to get to this stage ... including women coming on board, disabled coming on board etc ... reaching stage where weakest person has equal say, can stop a GS decision. Villages that are not fully adivasi, like Panchgaon in Maharashtra, have also shown it's possible.

Third session: Party and non-party politics

The session started with Vijay Pratap giving a brief history of party and non-party politics and how the party politics became diffused and only about winning elections and making governments. The non-party processes are crucial for bringing in significant policy changes e.g. NREGA, FRA, RTI, and they remain v. important. Some suggestions that he made were:

- unionization of the poor / marginalized / unorganized /informal, perhaps at Lok Sabha constituency level
- coherent narratives of our proposals, through something like the World Social Forum (WSF)
- policies for both traditional and modern sector livelihoods and occupations (>100 identified by Sengupta committee)
- governance reforms including greater powers to panchayats/GSs, and towards proportional representation instead of 'first past the post'

Other panellists like Rajni Bakshi, Soma KP, Rosamma, Suhas Kolhekar, Izamsai Katengey, Shrishtee Bajpai and Avinash added to the points, before the discussion was opened for everyone to comment. The discussions revolved few key points: *technology, ecological integrity, casteism, cultural resources, language, direct democracy, relevant laws and initiatives, and gender informed processes.*



Some of the key points that emerged were:

- ❖ How do we become a broadbase organization? Why is such a tiny section of India concerned, or interested ... and even tinier section involved in civil liberty issues? Why such widespread support for govt's action on Kashmir?
- ❖ MAKAAAM is a small attempt to combine strengths of women workers whose individual or isolated voices were not able to make a bigger difference. Attempt to make known the identity, dignity, importance, contribution of women farmers and farm workers to the economy and as a backbone of the nation. How we move towards a more gendered politics?
- ❖ The Maha Gramsabha process in Korchi where we engage with political parties but don't work with them. The need of people'sangathan came from the realisation that we need to take work in our hands to displace the political representatives from their positions of pre-eminence.
- ❖ As a young person, we must think towards envisioning for our future: we work collectively much more, understanding each other better, understanding ourselves better, construct new language that is not alienating and jargonized and that comes from our own lived experience, understand and go beyond ideological barriers giving them new form and language, give full importance to values/principles/ethics, and also focus on our own weaknesses (personal, institutional).

Several comments followed after the above sharing:

- ❖ How do we see full swaraj (purna swaraj) in the context of the corruption of representative democracy?
- ❖ In last 5.5 years, what has non-party political process achieved?
- ❖ Vaclav Havel's *Power to the Powerless* important message that 'workers of the world unite' cannot be a top-down imposition, but will be successful only if people really believe it.
- ❖ We need to think of various interpretations and dimensions of violence and non-violence, and be open to dialogue based on this.
- ❖ More attention to ecological issues ... can we amend Constitution to add ecological justice, respect of other species as fundamental, recognizing crucial role that biodiversity plays in our life.
- ❖ People/movements like us are not seen as political, or as a political platform, even outside party process. How do we deal with diversity of issues?
- ❖ Important to have a different language that is not alienating.
- ❖ Dalit women farmers' food sovereignty at Deccan Development Society in Telangana is as non-party political process as others. But how do we help sustain these in face of threats, to last beyond next 10-15 years, and how do we tell stories of these to youth so they know other possibilities

Day 4, 8. 10.2019: Electoral/party politics, state/govt accountability, transparency, participatory processes, and democracy within institutions.

Shankar Singh along with his MKSS colleagues started with a song that left the audience regaled.

Fourth Session: Electoral and party politics

The day started with discussion on thinking about alternatives to or for electoral and party politics. Vijay Pratap started the session with some key discussions points which was followed by comments by many participants.

- Today's crisis shouldn't be looked at only from the point of our own inadequacies and failures, but a history of challenges including the changing nature of parties from ground-based movements to those only seeking to win elections and gain power.
- Gandhi's vision of individual/collective swaraj with simple lifestyles etc ... vs. Nehru's on 'development' as liberator. On these issues, most/all parties are stuck in latter vision. Therefore need to think of new forms and nature of parties, or new birth of existing ones.
- How to deal with religious politics? Socialist, leftist, Gandhian, Ambedkar visions ... how do these relate to current situation, and how can there be some common agenda?
- Now our interventions are like jumping into running train ... and why intervene only during election times? Unless we start at grassroots, and take our time, with long-term, intervening only at 'top' levels will not work.
- Are elections inherently against democracy, in furthering competitiveness, bringing out the worst in us, giving over our power to elected reps?
- Can we all agree on annihilation of caste, and don't engage in caste politics ... can we all assert that we don't belong to any caste ?
- Giving up our power to representatives is a mistake, we have to believe in our own power, and through that choose our delegates or representatives who are answerable to us.
- While non-party political process is important, the issue of electoral/party politics is today crucial because it is a flood drowning all of us. We have not articulated alternatives to it. Aligning with today's parties does not seem to work, can we think of new forms of parties and get into electoral politics ... also in the belief that majority is not necessarily fascist even if they do vote for fascist party?

Fifth Session: State accountability, transparency and participatory process



Nikhil Dey of MKSS shared about the evolution of the Right to Information Act and subsequent to that, now MKSS's work in pushing for a law on accountability.

He said that many people doubted our campaign on information, asking why we are moving away from land, minimum wages etc. But when we launched, widespread public involvement, as everyone realized how basic information is to all demands about basic needs. Our campaigns on rights-based legislations, take all the above into account: information, employment, accountability.

6 ingredients (Bhilwara principles) of accountability as legislation:

- Information (meaningful, truthful)
- Hearings
- Timebound processing of issues/complaints
- Participation at each step
- Security of complainant
- Public platforms to voice all above

Post this, Mohan Hiralal Hirabai spoke about Gramdan Act which was a progressive piece of legislation strengthening democracy. In 1940s onwards campaign on land began; not just *bhoodan* (where ownership remained), but beyond that *gramdan*, which challenged private property itself. Mendha-Lekha has used it to commonise all lands in 2013. In Maharashtra, employment guarantee law was another campaign, where campaign was based on study circles examining what kind of law and procedures would work. Lot of attempts by govt to break the movement, but people persisted, and state govt had to bring in law.

Third, Forest Rights Act was another progressive piece of legislation. Starting with 1984, Jungle Bachao Manav Bachao Andolan in Gadchiroli and subsequent campaigns across country and Mendha-Lekha as first village to get CFRs, and Gadchiroli as most successful area of implementation.

These interventions triggered some interesting discussions. Some points are mentioned below:

1. We talk of making the state transparent, but reverse is happening, with state making us transparent through surveillance etc.
2. Second, how to make non-state actors, e.g. companies, shops, more accountable and transparent?
3. How to communicate tangible examples of benefits of RTI etc, to general public, so such tools can be used more widely and reduce burden on RTI activists.
4. On judicial accountability, our expectations from courts are being belied; whole structure is scary, so our attempt to make it less fearful for people who want to approach courts, and make judges fearful of the law.
5. Statutory Authorities (SEBI, TRI, Irrigation authorities) also important to keep control over state agencies, make them accountable ... but major erosion of these institutions in last few years.
6. Technology is neither good, nor bad, but also not neutral ... it has politics behind it, and till we are able to understand and use this politics for our benefit, technology will be used against us.
7. What provisions we need, our tools to fight this system and groups. Now we need to think of how we strengthen our narratives.

Nikhil Dey responded to some these queries/discussions/questions by saying that many doubts about movements for accountability etc have been raised but unless we keep trying, and have faith in movements, we will not move ahead. We have to sustain even after victories like RTI since they are always under threat.

Principles of transparency etc are useful for all movements and for all institutions of power at all levels including market and judiciary and religious institutions and political and so on.

Ultimately, however, it is about a culture of transparency, not only laws ... and so important to see how transparent we ourselves are.

Sixth Session: Democracy within our institutions

Kamayani Keki and Mukesh Nirvasat posed some questions for the entire group to centre the discussions on this vast topic:

Main questions

- *What kind of internal inequality have you seen?*
- *What steps to prevent inequality?*
- *What steps to remove inequality if seen?*
- *Nature of leadership?*
- *Nature of decision-making?*
- *Decentralisation of power?*

The questions led to some fascinating discussion points. Some are listed below:

1. Evaluations are not built into the working culture.
2. Things to look at:
 - Rotation: often an excuse that no-one else is capable yet, so retain our chair (but this means we have not built succession into system)
 - Lack of system or structure becomes an excuse or reason for inequality.
3. We seldom promote democracy in our own organisations; ‘leaders’ must open themselves up to criticism, reflection, etc.
4. Constant mode of fire-fighting, so often no time to give priority to internal issues of gender, caste, etc, esp. in movements
5. Shankar Singh shared about MKSS’s work culture and how they try to be transparent about how we work and what money they get (displayed in public), etc. Their internal reflections, encourages openness about issues with each other. MKSS has a central working committee that is only villagers ... often their concern that they are not as pro-active, but they keep us healthy.
6. Leaders must rotate; decision-making and responsibilities must be collectively taken
7. Ashish Kothari spoke about Kalpavriksh’s working culture, wherein they have a horizontal working space, they follow consensus based decision making, have minimum and maximum salary rule and have strictly maintained the balance. They also try to engage in self-reflection process.
8. Jaggarnath from Sagatin Kissan Mazdoor Sangathan in Uttar Pradesh shared about how in his sagathan there are no office-bearers or posts, all are equal, and all involved in taking decisions.

In the evening, a special session was organised on Kashmir issue. Shaikh Gulam Rasool of School for Rural Development and Education, Kashmir shared about the history of Kashmir struggle and what it means to have autonomy snatched away.

He said *“Lets recall that during partition, not a single Hindu in Kashmir was harmed; Gandhi acknowledged it in saying that is one ray of hope. Lets also recall that when given option to join Pakistan, Shaikh Abdullah chose ‘secular’ India, got Section 370 in negotiation between two potentially sovereign states, with telecommunications, defence, and foreign affairs only with Delhi, rest with Srinagar. Instrument of accession also included that there will be a referendum, in case of controversy, to decide where Kashmir will go. In this we had our own Constitution, our own flag. None of us believed that 370 could be abrogated,*

because if this happens, it breaks Accession agreement, in which case Kashmir is no longer part of India. But it happened ... and without any consent of Constituent assembly of Kashmir as laid down in agreement”.

“Many journalists from outside Kashmir have sneaked in and reported on the situation, but no-one from local media is able to. Only those journalists listed in J&K govt, can file stories from a controlled outlet. Impact of all this is that while earlier the 1990s armed struggle had been mostly convinced to leave arms, now they will be back in full force or more. Huge anger and frustration in youth, and saying we may as well die fighting, we are going to die anyway. But at this time, very few people are wanting to talk, for fear of reprisal.”



Day 5, 9.10.2019: Group Reports & Discussion on Way Forward

On the last day, participants were divided into small groups based on the four themes to sum up the discussions. Some of the points that emerged are as follows.

Seventh Session: Group reports

Group 1: Direct democracy

While decentralization is recognized in Constitution, esp. through 73/74th amendments, there are inadequate powers at gram sabha level, some extended through PESA. Examples like Mendha-Lekha, Korchi Maha Gramsabha worth learning from; also examples in multi-caste, adivasi-non-adviasi villages. Combination of our own govt in our village, but since we have elected govt in state/nation, they should be accountable to us, and all their work in our village should be through consensus based consent of GS. Examples of Ladakh experience with villages (home stays) and attempts (very inadequate) at an Autonomous Hill Council, also to learn from.

Some experiences from cities (like Bhuj), where local governance issues are more complex. ‘Hamare mohalla mein hum hi sarkar’ still to be attempted, need to work on the rules that neighbourhoods can work with. 74th amendment can be implemented in full spirit, with neighbourhood considering itself a family and collective.

Group 2: Electoral politics

Need to add many more people in such activities, to add more perspectives and understanding, and over next few months organize a bigger gathering including political parties etc. We should explore all options tried or proposed on proportionate representation, and experiments like electronic voting machines (EVMs). Though we have weak capacity in influencing political parties and electoral parties, we should continue doing what we can, including identifying non-NDA parties to engage with (dialogue, not joining: samvaad, judaav nahin). Old dialogues amongst Gandhi, Ambedkar, Nehru etc on democracy & politics must be brought back into public domain, increasing our own historical understanding. Need strategies for short, medium, and long-term and the latter needs a lot of thought and strategizing.

- Use of People's Manifestos as a tool for all elections, starting with Jharkhand and Bihar over next year.
- Crucial to work with youth and youth workers, help increasing their understanding of politics (incl fascism), help guide their actions building on their own perspectives and understanding.
- Need greater understanding of public perceptions re. elections, taking help of experts and others. This would include greater understanding of why even marginalized groups like dalits vote for BJP or related parties.
- Parliamentary watch is important, monitoring what our representatives do.
- Connecting with people in simple language, not using our usual jargon.

Group 3: Transparency, accountability, participation

The discussions revolved around transparency and issues of people not finding out information about why/how projects are being carried out.

E-Mitra distortions and lack of transparency on functioning; also should not replace face-to-face accountability ... so importance of social audits and public hearings.

- Need strategies for pro-active disclosure or obtaining information relevant to govt schemes, programmes, etc. Also more transparency of religious institutions, and their finances.
- Social Audit Commission, independent like Election Commission, needs to be set up for public redressal. Plus Complaints Redressal law. Public as jury in social audit system. And to bring all institutions including corporations.
- Balance sheet of performance by govt officials and agencies should be in public domain, which would include good work done by them.
- Others issues on which much discussion could not take place: transparency in media, unions, banks, NGOs, etc. Also qs. of balance between transparency and privacy needs consideration, so that former does not become excuse for state surveillance.
- Network of social audit movement is necessary ... perhaps to start with sarpanches and gram sabhas (e.g. from Kachchh sarpanch Suresh Chhanga, and the team from Vadgam working with MLA and Dalit activist Jignesh Mevani).



Group 4: Transparency etc in our own institutions

Within the subgroup on the above theme, there were three focus areas:

What kind of internal democracy is missing, and inequalities experienced.

- Lack of representation / structural discrimination
- Invisible power of older leadership
- Sharing of resources within the institutions

The collective principles that the group agreed on:

- To maintain internal democracy, ad-hoc efforts won't be sufficient; rather we need policy-planned efforts, which are flexible and which give priority to human principles.
- Collective decision-making process
- Transparency
- collective leadership rather than individualistic leadership

Some key questions that the group dealt with-

1. Should the decision-making body be elected or appointed?
2. Consensus-based decision making as far as possible?
3. If the structure is formal, then as much parity as possible and if informal, then accept that it is also non-equal and take steps to eradicate such inequality?
4. Should groups be large or small; is there something inherent in large groups to be hierarchical and bureaucratic even if their founders did not intend this?

Some suggestions and possible solutions to the issues above:

1. In decision making spaces all groups must be represented not just old or fulltime employees.
2. Provision of reservation in decision making group and allocation of resources, especially for the marginalised
3. Income in relation to resources 1: 3 or 1: 2 or on the basis of minimum wage

4. Strengthening feminist thinking and ability to talk about sexuality and love relationships within movements and organizations.
5. To increase the capacity of new and young leadership to prepare them continuously for leadership (for this it is considered mandatory to take time out of work pressure).
6. Let the leadership be rotational
7. Economic Transparency
8. Transparency in decision making
9. Regular meetings
10. To internalize the values espoused in individual as well as family life.
11. Self code of conduct with peer evaluation, and for this start a process of various organisations assessing each other.
12. Dialogue to look at everyone's issues and needs.
13. A collective fund should be formed with the contribution from the volunteers/members/ employees etc. It could be used to reduce dependency on funding agencies, for any contingencies and to support members who come from underprivileged backgrounds.

Post this session, MKSS presented the Rajasthan Government's 'Jan Soochana' portal as an example of how information that was restricted to govt officials can be publicly available, on implementation of govt schemes/programmes down to level of individuals who are supposed to be beneficiaries (e.g. those accessing ration shops in each village); also info on mining leases (where, how big, who by etc), etc. Already 2.5 lakh people have accessed this, viewing 9 lakh bits of information.

Eighth Session: Ways forward and responsibilities

List of commitments and teams

1. Yuva Charter on four elements the Democracy VS focussed on

- Direct/radical democracy (power exercised by people on the ground), non-party political process
- Representative democracy (power exercised by elected/selected representatives), party politics
- Democratic governance by the state: accountability, transparency, inclusion, participation, spaces for dissent, etc
- Democracy within movements/civil society

Team: Rachna, Shashi, Rohan, Kejal, Bharti, Venkat, Avinash, Poorva, Max, Arpana, Rajiv, Shubhangi, and Anita

2. Public Statement on Kashmir

Team: Kavitha, Rajendran, Meera, and Abha

3. Bihar and Jharkand elections group: 1. Dialogue with political parties and 2. Peoples Manifesto for the two states 3. Meeting like-minded sangathans

Team: Vijay Pratap, Shashi, Kankana, Avinash, Tsewang, Meera (lead: Vijay).

4. A group on governance in terms of bio-regions.

Team: Rajni, Ashish, Rohit, Tsewang, Shrishtee, Pravindar

5. A group on electoral politics and reforms

Team: Kavitha, Aruna, Charles, Shahshi, Sohini, Venkat, Nachiket, Avinash, Abha, Rosamma, Satish, Jagarnath, Namgail, Rajiv.

6. Internal democracy of social movements, organisations and networks

Team: Aravind, Satish, Meera, Shubhangi, and Shrishtee (lead: Meera and Shubhangi)

7. To write articles based on discussions at the Democracy VS

Team: Shubangi, Anita, Ashish, Shrishtee