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Blog Trek, the next generation

Hi! This blog is testament to the fact that the voices in my head are truly out of my control! Rather than going crazy about it, i've decided to channel them constructively!

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TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2015

Report from Vikalp Sangam, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, held in Feb 2015

VIKALP SANGAM OFFERS VISIONS OF HOPE Gathering of Tamil Nadu groups near Madurai

The Vikalp Sangam held near Madurai recently, was a rejuvenating and recharging experience for folk who have worked on development issues for decades. The difference was, this was not merely another talk shop. Ashish Kothari of Kalpavriksh, a founding person behind the series of gatherings for 'Another world is possible', outlined the fact that everyone present knows that we are slowly but surely destroying the earth and creating more and more inequalities. The question is what can we do about it. The inspiring part was the many, many people who **are** doing something concrete and positive to save the planet, who told their inspirational stories.

This was not a place for arm-chair activists to hold forth on the problems of the world. Here, we listened to a multitude of people, young and old, who have done years of conservation work to green the earth. To feed us with healthy organic grains and vegetables, to reforest arid lands and to bring back valuable ancient wisdom, so the younger generation can continue the work begun by iconic people like Nammalwar, founder of the biggest organic farmers' movement in Tamilnadu.

There were representatives from other sectors too. Shankari a transgender activist and Shakthi, working to create space for and fight for the rights of sexual minorities. Rajiv Rajan a remarkable young man with cerebral palsy,, fighting for persons with a disability. Health professionals like Vaidyas Raveendran and Unnikrishnan, performing miracles everyday, through ayurveda. And Dr.Regis George who after 10 years as a doctor in Sittlingi, Dharmapuri, turned to organic millets to have a real impact on infant and maternal mortality.

Elango Rangasamy, working at grassroots on strengthening local economies, has drawn many young followers like a magnet. Elango gave up a Chennai central government job to work on local governance in his village, Kuthambakkam. He contested panchyat elections, to win 2 successive terms. His pioneering model of Sustainable Rural Internal Economy led him to found the Panchayat academy. He held his audience spell bound as he told his story of economic transformation.

The range of people was truly remarkable. There were young urbanites spreading the message about organic food. ReStore began in Chennai and has dynamic young people running it, linking farmers with urban buyers. Sangeetha, young multi-tasking, efficient co- founder of ReStore tells a compelling story. It was a meeting full of promise.

When one sees a young man Parameshwaran, who after getting an aeronautical engineering degree, opts to spread the organic farming message, one feels a surge of hope. Parameshwaran convinces us that 33 cents of land can feed a family of four. What's more, this is his livelihood as well as his mission and his passion. There were several older men based in rural Tamilnadu who have quietly, without fanfare, transformed their villages and spread the message of greening the earth. One could write a book about them.

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The linking together of practitioners, young and old, experienced and new, is what rejuvenates and holds out the promise of hope. There were Nilgiris adivasis working to implement the Forests Rights Act. Besides drawing the entire crowd to dance and sing to their irresistible drumbeat, they educated PhD holders about the letter and spirit of the Forest Rights Act. A reversal of roles indeed.

Just Change, a rivetting alternative economic idea linking together producers, consumers and for the first time, ethical investors, attracted many young people to its session.

The intention of the Vikalp Sangam was to bring together stories of hope from different sectors. The main themes centred around politics, economics, democracy, social justice, culture, knowledge and diversity and ecological sustainability. The discussions focussed on these pillars for a future, saner society.

Perhaps, the proof of the meeting's energizing effect was best expressed by Dr.Regis George and Vaidya Raveendran. Both arrived tentatively, wondering what this was all about. Both left energised and pleased they had come to listen and be heard. Everyone left with hope in their hearts, for a saner, safer, better world. They decided it was imperative to continue the process with a series of local confluences across Tamil Nadu, bringing in people from many other sectors also to work together for such a world.

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Vikalp Sangam

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Nikhil VJ

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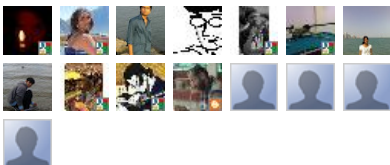
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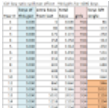
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