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Kalpavriksh at 40: An environmental organisation's journey (1979-2019)

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NOTICE



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Kalpavriksh at 40: An environmental organisation's
journey (1979-2019)



Compiled by Shiba Desor

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Prologue

As I compile this, I am very aware of the bias inherent in the recording of any history, including this one. Looking at the richness of material, how does one decide what is important to mention, and what can be ignored? How does one read the silences? Power and the season of the soul play out in ways beyond consciousness — not only in what is available to be seen and to sift through, but also in what stands out and is finally chosen to be shown.

Being largely based on written material, the account would have a bias towards what has already been documented over the years, and may have missed out on things left unwritten. It has also been informed by the subjective sense of Kalpavriksh (KV) imbibed over my own interaction with this space over the past ten years. In no sense does this document give a complete picture of what KV is. What KV stands for is different for everyone who has engaged with it. The document provides a small, inevitably biased, snapshot of what KV has gone through as it has zigzagged its way through the changing landscape of environmentalism, professional activism, work environments and personal philosophies. Hopefully, it also gives a small sense of the kind of conversations and debates that have had a hold on KV's collective imagination and consciousness, as it has grappled with questions of identity, authenticity and values. Full names are used wherever possible as there is an expectation for the readership to go beyond members of KV.

This account of institutional history has benefited from all the recordings before this one, especially the internal newsletters of

the first two decades of Kalpavriksh. In 1982, the internal newsletter was started with the words, ‘Have you ever felt that there is a lack of communication within the group?’ These newsletters, which continued for about 15-18 years reflect the serious yet jovial tone of KV, and have been used here to help trace the institutional journey. KV still has an internal newsletter, but now it is compiled only once a year, at the half-year mark, and it is much more report-like, with its contents mostly authored for going directly into the Annual Report. This change could perhaps be attributed to the changing nature of the organisation and the increased availability of other avenues of communication such as emails and phone-based group chats. This shift in the tone of the newsletters over time is also reflected in this document, with the description of activities in the last two decades being particularly report-like as these were predominantly based on the Annual Reports.

The document limits itself to a discussion of KV activities and processes over 40 years, from the time of its first action in 1979 until the end of 2019. It therefore does not include a discussion of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on KV’s functioning. The main work of sifting through old files that had been carefully kept by Ashish Kothari happened during the months of August and September in 2019. I had come to Pune specifically for this purpose, taking a break from my work in the Andaman and Nicobar islands with another organisation (Sidenote: this return to the KV office space unexpectedly led me to meet my future husband who was working as an intern with KV at that time, illuminating KV’s role in many of its members’ lives as a space for forging deep personal relationships). A very preliminary draft

was prepared and discussed first in the Annual General Body Meeting of 2019 and then at the ‘KV at 40’ get together in December 2019. Apart from the two physical events in 2019, the draft was also discussed during an online presentation on November 7, 2020. The document reached its present form over a much longer period of time, as I slowly edited it and added bits and pieces from different sources, finding time for this in between other schedules of work, studies, and life.

Over this time, the document has benefitted from inputs from various others. I am thankful to the people who sent informal written testimonies (Pankaj Sekhsaria, Radhika Mulay, Meenal Tatpati, Shrishtee Bajpai, Sneha Gutgutia, Kanchi Kohli, Sujatha Padmanabhan, Seema Bhatt, Prabhakar Rao, Pradeep Malhotra, Anuradha Arjunwadkar, Meenakshi Kapoor, Kankana Trivedi, Sharmila Deo). I am thankful to Ashish Kothari, Sujatha Padmanabhan, and Neema Pathak Broome for their comments on the document and to Rudrath Avinashi for his help with the coordination. I would also like to acknowledge brief inputs from Prabhakar Rao, Tasneem Balasinorwala, Manisha Gutman, Anchal Sondhi and Milind Wani in relation to specific sections of the document. Despite the efforts of so many of us, the document may still unintentionally have some inconsistencies and gaps. I acknowledge the unfairness of having such gaps, but given the range and depth of KV’s work, it was beyond the scope of this effort to be able to represent all aspects adequately. I can only hope that it provides a starting point for further collective work to explore the deep, rich and complex history of this organisation.

Shiba Desor

BEGINNINGS

“Kalpavriksh is composed mostly of students who got together in 1979 to act against the visible deterioration of Delhi’s environmental condition. We had been feeling increasingly angry and frustrated at our learned elders, many of whom expressed concern about the environment in seminar after seminar, yet did nothing about it. The Indraprastha Power station continued to belch out tonnes of pollutants everyday and Delhi’s largest stretch of forest, the Ridge, continued to get smaller. So we decided to act. Taking the proposed large-scale construction on the Ridge as our focal point, we along with local residents held, in October 1979, a large rally demanding an immediate stop to all encroachments. Our protest was however obscured by the political turbulence of the period. It did serve to bring us together as an action group with an aim to do our bit in securing a more liveable environment.”



School students rally for protection of Delhi Ridge forest, 1979

These words are taken from an early pamphlet of Kalpavriksh, now yellow with the passing of four decades. While the Ridge forest rally is considered as the official beginning of KV, many of the youth involved had already been active in environmental awareness or action. They had been involved in at least two actions in 1978-79 that can be considered as precursors of KV—a demonstration against permission given to Saudi Arabian princes to hunt floricans and bustards, and a meeting with PM Morarji Desai regarding export of rhesus macaques.

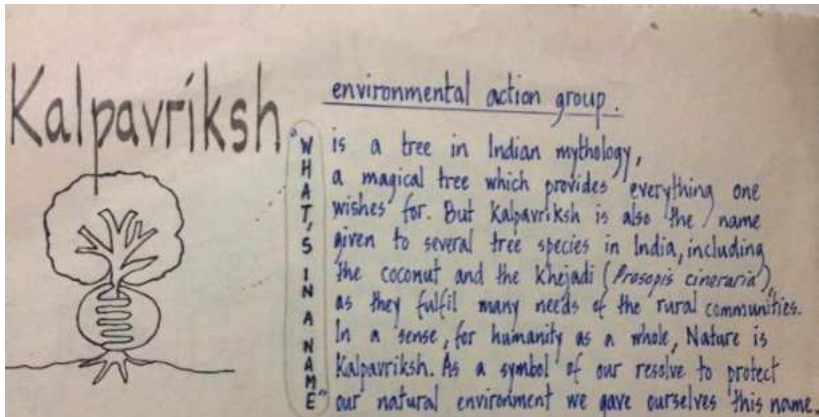


Pre-Kalpavriksh demonstration against bustard hunting by Saudi Arabian princes, outside Saudi Arabian embassy, Delhi, 1978 @ Mahendra Vyas

Some had been part of another group called Indian Youth Association for Environmental Studies and Conservation.¹ Plus, many were in nature clubs in their schools, another

¹ Mahendra Vyas, Jagdish Krishnaswamy, Mahesh Rangarajan, Pradeep Malhotra, Ashish Kothari and Geeta Rao

important launching pad. This mixed group of young people sowed the seeds of the environmental organisation called Kalpavriksh or KV.



Excerpt from an early, handwritten brochure on Kalpavriksh

The name Kalpavriksh did not emerge from the start. They called themselves Nature Club for a short while and had many discussions about what name would represent their group the best. 'Kalpavriksh' was one of a few options that were suggested by the mother of one of the members (Pallav Das) and was chosen after some discussion. Talking about the significance of the new name and identity, Pradeep Malhotra, a member who has been associated with Kalpavriksh since its beginning, recalls:

It was the answer to our needs...a newer, nurturing, all encompassing consciousness trying to speak through its members. And then there was no going back. Kalpavriksh started to look at things afresh...people, wildlife, forests, environment...seeing each as a part of the other, all things intrinsically bound together in an integral whole.

Soon peoples' issues became centre stage and a network of links began to emerge...of individuals and a wide range of institutions. Our consciousness was developed through ideas of small scale and human scale of E. F. Schumacher and the seminal ideas on politics and people like Rajni Kothari. Many of the members seamlessly moved in and out of Centre for Science and Environment, Gandhi Peace Foundation, Lokayan and other organisations debating ideas, attending meetings, participating in protest marches etc. Some contributed to the making of the first ever citizen's reports on the State of India's Environment in 1982 and 1984.



KV meetings in the early 1980s were held in parks of Delhi

In the 40+ years of its existence, the organisation has changed in many ways, evolving from a student-run voluntary group to now a registered NGO with funded projects and paid staff. Internal newsletters and minutes of internal meetings reveal a bit of what went on behind-the-scenes, how the structure and the functioning of the institution changed with time, and what remained the same.



Kalpavriksh as a celebration of life @ Ashish Kothari

INSTITUTIONAL JOURNEY

Although it was the Delhi ridge issue that brought the group together, activities of Kalpavriksh soon expanded to other themes, expanding beyond Delhi very quickly, with collaborations at local, national and even international levels. With its involvement in global environmental issues since early times, KV got many opportunities for international collaboration and financial support.²

From its inception, Kalpavriksh has been a membership-based organisation with members bringing in different interests and skills, even as ideas around membership have changed over time. As its activities started going beyond exclusively environmental issues to include overlapping socio-political realms, KV's official 'stands' took a toll on its membership. KV treaded the middle path between the two extremes of wildlife-centric and human-centric approaches. So for some hardcore wildlifers or conservationists, its approach was too 'people-centric' and for some members who liked to focus primarily on the social activism issues, there was too much weightage given to wildlife.

In 1984, when KV was awarded the Sanskriti Award for Outstanding Social Achievement in Delhi, whether to take this award or not became a subject of heated discussions, and

² For instance, a slide projector was donated by a Dutch member-organisation of the International Youth Federation for Environmental Studies and Conservation (IYF) in 1983 and there was an information exchange collaboration with Finnish organisation Luonto Liitto.

remains a sore spot for a few who were not in favour of it.³ Also, starting in the mid 1980s, for about a decade or so, a good number of KV members were working in the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) as well. This caused an occasional rift between the IIPA and non-IIPA members and a certain amount of confusion for some between the identity of the two organisations.

When KV began in 1979, members did not receive any monetary compensation for their activities and all the work involved a high degree of volunteerism and passion, as well as availability of time and a certain amount of economic privilege. The newsletters and other publications involved a lot of work in terms of typing, cyclostyling and distributing, all of which was done voluntarily by different members of the group. Some participated more actively than others but several opportunities for coming together were frequently enabled, such as at General Body Meetings, slide shows, trips and walks.

³ The award was to be given by the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Vigyan Bhawan, causing some opposition. In the end, the decision was to accept the award but also register a protest about the award being given by a politician who was not necessarily taking decisions conducive to environmental protection. Eventually it was not Rajiv Gandhi who gave the award. No protest was registered.



KV members on nature outings in/around Pune

In 1986, KV began discussing structural reorganisation for greater efficiency. The group decided to appoint project coordinators who would be responsible for regularly reporting to the General Body or GB and for involving other members in the project. For the first time, it was decided that members could be paid for their work. The internal newsletter of September 1986 reports on the ‘historic decision’ of the General Body:

...full-time paid members may be appointed for the purpose of sustained and intensive work on various KV projects. Some decision will be made so that KV’s decision making process does not get dominated by these paid members, and the voluntary nature of this organisation is maintained. The

modalities of this decision will be worked out by the Core Group (CG).⁴

The registration of Kalpavriksh as a Society under the Societies Registration Act on 19th January 1987 was a landmark in the KV journey as more structures began to be set in place. In that first financial year ending 30th June 1987, its income was Rs. 3800 and expenditure was Rs. 164!

By the early nineties, many of the initial members were getting honoraria, making it hard to describe KV as a student organisation anymore. Although a few members tried to keep the student flag flying for some more time, it had clearly become an established organisation involved in social and environmental issues at regional, national and global level.

The late 1990s was a period of transition. Several members had left Delhi and moved to Pune without any specific plan to continue KV work there. In fact some of them had been thinking about starting something new altogether. But a mixture of interest, logistics, and circumstance led to there being a group of people (Ashish Kothari, Sunita Rao, Neema Pathak Broome, Anchal Sondhi, Sanjay Sondhi, Pankaj Sekhsaria) working on KV projects and activities from Pune and thus 'KV Pune' was born.

⁴ The Core Group is a nominated body chosen at the Annual General Body Meeting; it has no special powers except under emergency situations, but it has some additional responsibilities. Two years after registration in 1987, KV announced Niti Anand and Kulan Amin as its first full-time employees (#35, 2 Aug. 1989).



Poster-making by KV members and their families - rather exhausting for male members, it seems!

Ashish Kothari explains, ‘Since there were now a good number of old members there and a number of others who were relatively fresh to environmental issues, so it felt a little like the early days- better rapport, a good understanding’.⁵ The coming into existence of KV Pune was accompanied by its own set of challenges in terms of coordination between the Delhi and the Pune members. By 2000-2001, the coordination had gotten a little better.⁶ Kanchi Kohli, who joined the organisation in 2000, recollects:

I joined the group to realise that I had joined two organisations. There were a KV Pune and a KV Delhi, with a broad ideological

⁵ Ashish Kothari in an internal interview dated 1st December, 1999.

⁶ Recorded in the AGBM 2000-01 minutes

tuning but structurally very distinct. This was exciting as one got to learn from two different ways of approaching work, life and institutional design. I did come to realise that it was a logistical challenge back then and I suppose that issue remains to some extent even now.

On the occasion of KV's 20th anniversary in 1999, Kalpavriksh began a series of presentations at both its sites (Delhi and Pune) on environment and development issues, with the common theme: 'Signs Of Hope'. These events continued for some years into the new decade and are still remembered fondly by many people, within and outside KV, who participated in these.

As KV entered a new decade, the coalescing of activities into distinct focus areas continued. With the work and reach continuing to grow and the advent of new forms of communication, conversations about having a Kalpavriksh website had already begun.⁷ The website work began in 2005, with the objective of the website becoming a major vehicle of outreach for and feedback on KV's activities. With the emergence of an office in Pune, there was also a geographical division of the team between Pune and Delhi. In 2004, KV celebrated its 25th year with an EcoMela.

Through the years, the organisation had collected nearly 3000 books and 2000 papers and innumerable magazines on various subjects related to the environment. It began discussing the need for getting its documentation centre organised and its

⁷ Recorded in the AGBM 1999 minutes.

history documented.⁸ The Documentation and Outreach Centre began in 2006, leading to regular updating of the reading room and the electronic databases with new titles as well as publishing of a bilingual *People in Conservation* newsletter, numerous policy briefs and other outreach material. The Doc-centre project, coordinated by Milind Wani since 2009, has also supported various workshops at the local and national level.

In the AGBM of 2005, members felt the need to initiate an internal evaluation of KV's functioning. The evaluation committee, comprising of Amita Baviskar, Seema Bhatt and Milind Wani, came up with a rich, detailed report which reflects some of the issues and concerns that continue till date.

The four focus areas (themes) of Conservation and Livelihood, Environment and Development, Environment Education and Urban Environment were formalised through a collective prioritisation exercise in 2006. There was an additional theme of 'Environment and Health' which was discussed and dropped.

By 2008-09, because of increased awareness about climate change, issues of biofuels and clean development mechanisms had entered the discussions within the environmental field. Discussing this, the members decided:

KV is not taking on climate change as an added theme. However climate change (CC) has already started affecting communities and issues that we work with and the discourse, politics, funding, and kinds of institutions and

⁸ Recorded in the AGBM 2005-06 minutes.

mitigation mechanisms being thrown up by CC will have serious repercussions on communities/issues. KV needs to see CC in this context. And make it a part of our work to the extent that there is an overlap with our existing focus.⁹

KV as a group needs to evolve their stand on biofuels soon. We need to be careful not to get into the trap of ‘adaptation’, or techno-fixes like biofuels and Clean Development Mechanism. Also to understand the politics of new mechanisms being suggested, such as REDD. Simultaneously understand India’s official position and actions, to work out positions/critiques, especially in relation to our core work areas.¹⁰

In its most recent decade of 2010s, KV has continued many previous activities while expanding and adding new elements such as sustained advocacy on community forest rights, publishing books for children on the themes of nature, environment and wildlife, and adding a fifth focus area of Alternatives, discussed in greater depth later. Meanwhile, its engagement in Pune’s local issues has declined; and over time grounded work on Delhi’s green areas has had to be handled by only one or two members. In January 2013, KV closed its Delhi office space as there were very few members based in Delhi that were using it for full-time work.

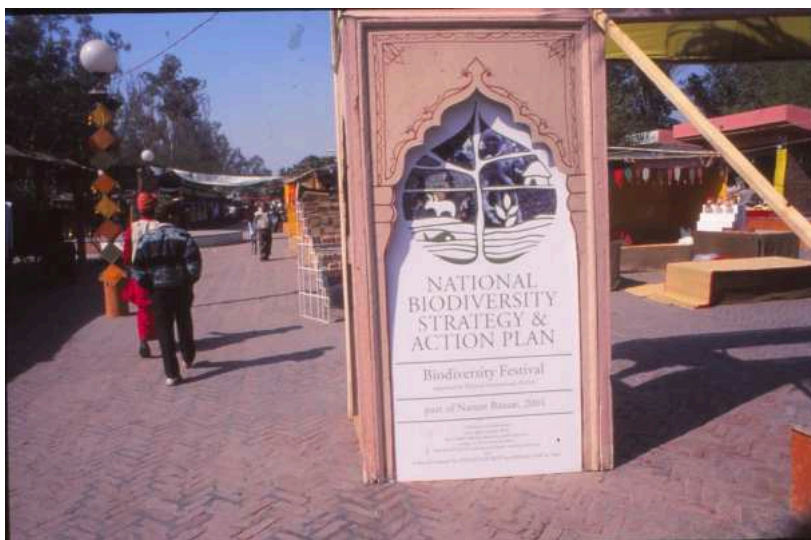
Over the decades, KV members have served on various central or state government committees, such as those for drafting the National Wildlife Action Plan and the Biological Diversity

⁹ Recorded in the AGBM 2007-08 minutes.

¹⁰ Recorded in the AGBM 2009-10 minutes.

Act, the Committee for the Assessment of River Valley Projects, the Committee to Assess Implementation of the Forest Rights Act, and committees set up under the Delhi and Pune Tree Acts.

As part of these engagements, there have been ongoing discussions on whether and how KV should engage with governmental agencies, in particular the pros and cons of being formal members of such committees, or taking on programmes with governmental funding such as the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. In general, the thinking has been that if such involvements are likely to be useful for the goals of the group, but without compromising its independence and the ability to be critical of the state when necessary, then KV should engage.



NBSAP related installations at Dilli Haat, early 2000s

As of December 2019, KV has 40 members in total, with a much smaller number engaging in KV activities full-time. Over this journey of 40 years, one member, Ashish Kothari, has been actively engaged with the group since the time of its inception to the present. Apart from all the members and interns that have brought their energies to the group, the contribution of the support staff based in Pune has been immense in the past two decades with long-term involvement of Sharnamma Hattargi, Govind Khalsode and Prajakta Kulkarni for more than a decade. One must also note here the three members, Oona Mansingh, Madhulika Goyal and Pratibha Pande, who have passed away and continue to live on in our memories.

In mid-December 2019, several old and young members and friends of KV got together to celebrate its 40th Anniversary at a farmhouse in Kolad (near Pune) looking back at KV history, sharing stories of KV-related life-changing moments, talking about the future, playing dumb charades, painting, debating, spidering and snacking.

DECISION-MAKING

Some of my most memorable moments have been with friends at KV, in all kinds of situations which in retrospect bring a smile on my face...discussions and debates, some acrimonious to the point of near fistfights, some friendly banter and sharing of notes on the way, excursions, projects...a deep sharing and a camaraderie one would not have liked to exchange for anything in the world. And also those moments of utter bewilderment as to where we were heading! - Pradeep Malhotra

KV works with certain principles and a specific philosophy that stresses on democratic decision-making and a carefully deliberated funding policy. A lot of these values came from the ideals and principles of the more active founding members within the group. Being a source of persistent discussions over the years, there have been some aspects of these working principles and ways of functioning that have stayed constant, while others have changed over time. Apart from the official meetings, informal conversations and break-time discussions have also played a role in the evolving values and positions of the members.

When KV began, it claimed to have a largely informal, non-hierarchical structure with all decisions being taken by the entire General Body with no voting or majoritarianism (except in case of emergencies where a smaller group of most active and responsible members may take decisions). Over time, while certain structures have been put in place that have formalised the organisation, KV members still do not have explicit hierarchical designations. At the same time, as

revealed in the KV evaluation committee report, some people do believe that there are invisible hierarchies.

At present, KV Pune has weekly office meetings for discussing administrative issues and sharing project updates. For decisions related to funding, collaboration or endorsement, there is also usually a mail to the mailing group of all members. Occasional emergency decisions are taken in the core group meetings.



KV members in the early years of the Pune office, late 1990s

The decision-making process has also led to its own challenges. There are often grey areas of fuzziness in decision-making, and differing opinions, always leaving scope for further debate and discussion. There have also been discussions around questions of 'KV identity' versus

'individual identities' and on official KV stands.¹¹ Accepting funding for different activities (from whom, how much, for what, etc.) is also a topic that has been constantly discussed (as discussed in detail in a later section).

Participation

Getting things organised, discussed and communicated to all has always been a challenge. Uneven voluntary participation in KV 'commons' and lack of follow up on committed tasks has been a source of regular angst within KV. An ex-member of KV has remarked that, in terms of work, Kalpavriksh has had 'a very relaxed culture' with people taking up lots of tasks during meetings, many of which do not get followed up subsequently. People within KV are also aware of this tendency and have tried to have collective reflection on the organisation's functioning time and again.¹²

Lack of participation of members in 'commons' has been a persistent complaint. Particularly in the 80s and 90s, these were regular complaints as reflected by the internal newsletters and there were many sustained efforts to get people to participate, with worries about KV's future (see box).

¹¹ Discussed in AGBM 2005-06.

¹² For instance, a questionnaire was circulated in the January 85 newsletter (Issue 7) to review how members view Kalpavriksh.

KV's Future - a persistent concern in the 1980s and 1990s

On 24th May 1988, a CG meeting was organised on the ominous topic of 'Should KV disband?' This was followed by a GB meeting on 11th June 1988 by the members to realistically assess themselves and their responsibility towards KV.¹³ The consensus was that it should not disband, with members making renewed pledges to complete pending work. The newsletter records: Though most members seemed to think that the situation was not as grave as made out to be, very little emerged by way of indicating a new dynamism within KV. The next few months will reveal if KV members will take themselves seriously and work responsibly and productively'.¹⁴

Two years later, when only 10 members ended up participating in the AGBM of 1990, the internal newsletter called for a repeat AGBM and also asked 'Should KV wind up and KV-ites go their own ways?' In July 1993 there was another call for reflection through a questionnaire asking members 'exactly what you want from KV and how much time, energy and other resources you are willing to contribute to the running of the group?'

The question of KV's future came up again in March 1995 newsletter, with questions of commitment for time, space and other resources to handle some of the administrative tasks and hold the KV material (books, posters),

¹³ 28th May 1988 newsletter.

¹⁴ Aug.1988 newsletter.

specifically in view of Sunita Rao and Ashish Kothari's planned shift from Delhi by the summer of 1996. These logistical questions were put along with the more reflective questions regarding, 'How much does each of you need KV? What does KV mean to you?' The Annual Report of 1996-97 also had a small section labelled 'Revitalise KV!' calling for commitment of time and encouraging people (who are aye-sayers to the KV idea) to come forward to work together.

Membership

Discussions on who qualifies as a Kalpavriksh member is another persistent topic. It is often, but not always, connected to participation. For instance in the AGBM of 2004, it was discussed that old members no longer working on any projects can continue being members with an expectation of regularly paying the membership fees and having an active involvement in KV activities.¹⁵ Even as reporting structures may be different in Pune and Delhi, regular information sharing is valued and considered important. By 2007-08, it was decided that by and large there should be a uniform criteria for remaining a member as otherwise it leads to feelings of inequality. However given the history of KV, some space was to be made for old Delhi members even if not currently active – with KV Delhi to evolve its own rules on an additional category of associate membership. In 2013, tensions were caused by a lack of protocol for juggling representation of multiple identities while being involved on a KV project. This

¹⁵ Recorded in the AGBM 2004 minutes.

led to preparation of a draft terms of engagement by the Core Group which was read out and agreed upon in the AGBM of 2013.



KV AGBM at Tadoba, Maharashtra, 2010

Reflection and introspection

Members of KV occasionally reflect upon their work as a group and its role in the larger environmental and social context. This tone of introspection is also found in the internal newsletter piece titled ‘are we just once-a-month Lodi gardens group?’ dated December 1996. It ends with the remark, ‘Bingo’¹⁶ rightly pointed out that we are tending towards being just another group that meets in a nice place each month and goes away without ever putting its finger into the numerous

¹⁶ Farhad Vania.

messy situations in Delhi. What do others feel? Please let us know.’

A draft note on the working philosophy of KV was discussed during the 2004 AGBM for distilling and articulating the principles of functioning such as voluntarism, non-hierarchical functioning, minimal and equitable pay, democratic decision making, and small organisational scale. During the discussions, the members emphasised the need to focus on networking and partnership rather than upscaling, and the need to build ‘indicators of alarm’. This ‘philosophy’ note is discussed and updated as the need arises every once in a few years in the AGBM, becoming a source of collective reflection with questioning and discussions on many of these principles happening time and again.



KV Pune office, early 2000s

The KV Evaluation process in the mid 2000s is also an indicator of such reflection. The contradiction between work and life, real and perceived, has also been an evergreen topic. With the changing professional environment, there has been an investment in office facilities and increased travel. In mid 2016, with concerns being raised about excessive air travel and its ecological costs, a travel policy was formalised by the group. In October 2017, there was also a formal internal ‘reflections’ meeting of members, staff and interns with the idea of using the Alternatives Transformations Format¹⁷ to review the functioning of KV in the ecological, social, economic and political spheres (the meeting was not able to cover the cultural sphere because of limitations of time). During that meeting, diverse matters weighing on the minds of participants were explored such as internal communication and sensitivity, diversity in inclusion within KV, ecological living (practising what we preach), hierarchy of work (with publishing activities being given more recognition as ‘work’ than the more banal tasks) and non-project ways of funding activities.

Funding discussions

There were differing opinions about the criteria for accepting and rejecting funding within the group, leading to frequent discussions on the topic. In the early years, KV members were extremely critical of the ‘seminar cult’ and deliberately kept

¹⁷ A format for self-assessment that Kalpavriksh developed as part of the Academic-Activist Co-generation of Knowledge on Environmental Justice (ACKnowl-EJ) project. See [Alternatives Transformation Format | Vikalp Sangam](#) .

their expenses small, 'conscious of the fact that ostentatious expenditure is part of an environmentally destructive culture'.¹⁸ They publicly protested against the International Seminar on Environment Education in 1981 on the same premise. As a stand against large-scale extravagant seminars, in Oct 1981, they organised a 3 day workshop for about 80 students with minimal costs (less than Rs. 50).

In 1985, the group approved the government as a funding source but decided to continue to not take foreign funds. Instead it could have exchange programs and accept materials from non-funding foreign agencies.¹⁹ When KV was nominated for the K.P. Goenka Memorial Award for Environment in 1989, it refused the award because 'as a policy we do not accept money from the corporate sector'.²⁰

In 1992, there was a decision to apply for 80G (tax exemption status) and a review of the funding policy to discuss corporate and foreign funding, especially in light of a one-year long MoEF project on environment education getting funds from UNEP/UNDP and World Bank.²¹ This led to revising the policy to accept funds from the UN²² routed through the Government of India, while direct foreign funds, including from the UN, continued to be considered not acceptable. Support in kind was acceptable from foreign NGOs and the UN.

¹⁸ KV- early years note.

¹⁹ 11 Aug 1985 newsletter.

²⁰ (Newsletter dated 1st September 1990).

²¹ Internal newsletter of January 26, 1992.

²² UN/UNDP/UNEP/FAO.

There were heated debates about taking up large projects. On 3 December 1995, the core group discussed whether KV should take on large projects and the accompanying financial and administrative implications. It called for an Extraordinary GBM (EGBM) on 17 Feb. 1996. For that meeting, member Ranjit Lal shared a note saying that such a move will undermine 'the spirit of voluntarism, goodwill and friendship, all served with a dash of sheer idealism'. 'It is not KV's brief to make careers out of environmental problems and issues'.

In that Extraordinary General Board Meeting or EGBM, it was discussed that there is nothing wrong in taking up funded projects but these should not dictate KV's course of action and should be limited in size 'because large projects (that require extensive infrastructure) could lead us into becoming institutionalised and bureaucratic.



Below the volcano, July 2020 @ Ashish Kothari



Early traditions of meeting in parks in Delhi were occasionally - only occasionally - carried on in Pune

The group could not arrive on a set of rules which could be the basis to decide on projects, so it was decided that the CG/GB would decide it on a case to case basis, ‘and that going against and/or endangering KV’s spirit was a valid objection that could be raised’.²³

Funding again became a point of deliberation since KV Pune needed office funds and the ongoing piggybacking on projects from IIED (International Institute for Environment and Development) that members were doing in a personal capacity could not be a long term sustainable solution. Corpus funding was discussed with a mixed response. A major decision was taken regarding applying for getting foreign funds under

²³ As reported in the May 1996 newsletter.

the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act or FCRA, albeit 'with a lot of caution to be exercised if and when KV takes foreign funds'.²⁴ This meant giving up the long-held policy of saying no to direct foreign funds. Corporate funding continued to be considered unacceptable. By 2004-05, as KV received its FCRA certificate, the funding policy began getting formalised. The decision was to consider funding sources on a case-to-case basis using a funding criteria but funds from World Bank and the corporate sector were considered as unacceptable. Individual donations and collaboration with the corporate sector was considered as acceptable.

Keeping in mind equity and parity considerations, the salary or honoraria range was fixed at Rs. 7000 to 14,000 within KV as a whole in the 2000-2001 AGBM. It was decided that within each project, the differential should not be more than Rs. 4000-5000.²⁵ While the differential may not be maintained as such, until today KV continues to have a limit on maximum pay for a KV member from KV projects, as also a ratio between the maximum and minimum pay that is as small as possible (as of 2021, it is 2:1). The limit on pay, and this ratio, have been other points of repeated internal debate, discussion, and evolution.

²⁴ Recorded in the AGBM 1999 minutes.

²⁵ For field-based projects, where cost of living could be very different, the lower and upper limits could be flexible, at the discretion of the project coordinator and keeping in mind the general ethics of pay parity. This also applies to people who live abroad.



Food has always been an excuse for getting together; a collective meal in Pune, 2019

In the AGBM of 2004, there was also a separate discussion on financial security for members to tide over difficult periods since there is no assured salary, no Provident Fund, no medical or other securities. Associated with this were the questions of whether a small salary is a kind of tokenism and hypocrisy, underestimating requirements, which are then compensated by inequitably distributed socio-economic privilege, or engagement in out-of-KV work which again may be more feasible for some than for others. A sub-group was formed to see how a sense of financial security could be built into the group. Since then, this question has surfaced every once in a while, with attempts at some form of resolution or the other.

THEMES

KV has had an understated but remarkable history of engagement and participation in the environmental and social activism landscape in India through its different activities spanning over four decades. A snapshot of KV's trajectory and growth over these 40+ years is provided here. The themes are roughly divided into the five major focus areas, while acknowledging that the work actually coalesced into distinct and separate themes only in the late 1990s.



Turtle tracks on a beach in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, 2002 @ Pankaj Sekhsaria

Environment and Development



Rally against hydropower projects on Indravati River, Hemalkasa (Maharashtra), mid-1980s

1980s

The Delhi ridge protest led to an involvement in advocacy for green cover protection in Delhi (covered in detail in Urban Environment section). KV's involvement in issues at an international level also happened early. During the conference of the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in New Delhi in 1981, KV, along with IYF (International Youth Federation for Environmental Studies and Conservation), presented a memorandum to Belgium's delegate demanding that Belgium should ratify the Convention, and stop importing large numbers of Indian endangered species products. This, coupled with similar actions by groups in Europe, finally resulted in ratification by Belgium. KV later became a member of IYF and joined a campaign against the ecologically destructive role of European nations and companies in the Third World. It also took part in an international signature campaign against the proposed dumping of nuclear wastes in the Pacific by Japan, and nuclear tests by France, at the request of a Japanese anti-nuclear group.

A 50-day trek along the Narmada river in the summer of 1983 was a watershed event in terms of creating a consciousness amongst the members about the politics of ecology. The trek was organised in association with the Hindu College Nature Club with a small amount of funds received through an application to 'promotion of adventure' by the sports ministry. A few members were there throughout the entire trek while others joined for specific sections. The experience of the trek significantly shaped the lives of the people involved. Living on

a strict budget of Rs. 15 per person per day, the trekkers still remember the luxury of the caramel pudding prepared for them by a care-taker at the NSP guesthouse in Harsud, ‘a face reader of sorts’,²⁶ who insisted that ‘Subhash Chandra Bose was alive and would come back to save India’.²⁷ During the trek, they studied the environmental implications of the massive irrigation and hydel projects coming up in the Narmada Valley. They saw beautiful forests and temples that would come under submergence. They also visited groups working in the region such as Mitti Bachao Abhiyaan in Hoshangabad and Friends Rural Center in Rasulia, thereby connecting with diverse organisations and networks.



KV and Hindu College Nature Club members on Narmada trek, 1983

²⁶ email comm. by Ranu Bhogal (formerly Ranu Kayasth).

²⁷ email comm. Ashish Kothari.

After coming back from the Narmada trek, they published detailed critiques of the project in 1984 in *Economic and Political Weekly* ²⁸ (EPW), and *The Ecologist*. This study and its subsequent processes are of great interest to environmental historians since, according to historian Ramachandra Guha, ‘it was by reading the article in the EPW that Medha Patkar, then a social activist in the city of Mumbai, decided to shift to the Narmada valley to work there’.²⁹ Since then, Patkar has been on the forefront of the long ongoing struggle of Narmada Bachao Andolan.

As a follow up to the trek, KV conducted an intensive study of Amarkantak, the source of Narmada and an important catchment area in Madhya Pradesh. By 1985, the group had become actively involved in the movement against the Narmada project, and in issues relating to other big dams. The peak period of KV's involvement in the Narmada movement was between late 80s and early 90s. Apart from filing a petition in the Narmada case in 1988 and running a newsletter on big dams titled *Narmada* for some years, KV also published *The Narmada Valley Project: A Critique* in 1988. KV also participated in a public event initiated in Hemalkasa by Baba Amte on 22-23 April, 1989 for assertion of collective will against big dams. That summer, KV organised a second brief trek on Narmada to study the impacts of the Omkareshwar project. On Sept 26, 1989, they participated in the national rally against destructive development at Harsud, with a

²⁸ Kothari A and Bhartari R 1984, Narmada Valley Project- Development or destruction?, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 19, Issue No. 22-23, 02 Jun.

²⁹ Guha R 2013, ‘Turning the flow- when development may also mean destruction’, *The Telegraph*, 24 August.

follow-up decision to be a part of a 'Vikalp Samiti' with twin ideas of joint action and a discussion forum on environment and development.



Human chain at Hemalkasa (Maharashtra) across Indravati River, protesting proposed hydroelectricity projects, 1989

Simultaneous to involvement with issues in the Narmada valley, other studies of environmental impact of industrial development also continued. In the summer of 1983, some members undertook a study in Shahdol regarding social and environmental impacts of Amlai paper mill, and in 1984, of the thermal power plant and coal mining in Singrauli (Bihar, UP). At the request of villagers of Molad Band in South Delhi, KV conducted a short investigation into effects of pollution from the Badarpur Power Plant, revealing the serious nature of the problem, especially due to coal dust from the plant.

The Bhopal Gas Tragedy of 1984 was another event that shook the nation and deeply influenced several members within KV who extended solidarity to the local protests. KV joined the Delhi Committee on Bhopal Gas Tragedy, taking part in one field investigation in Bhopal, but eventually withdrew due to its becoming particularly directed against one political party whereas KV members wanted to ask more structural questions.



KV members joining a demonstration on the Bhopal gas tragedy, in Delhi, 1985

KV was also involved in highlighting the dangers of toxic chemicals storage and usage at Shriram Chemicals Factory in New Delhi, before the oleum gas leakage incident of December 4th, 1985 at this factory. It led to KV's first ever legal intervention in early 1986 in the case filed by Hindustani Andolan's M.C. Mehta regarding the leak. This also led to a

second related intervention regarding the right to information concerning hazardous industries.³⁰ In November 1986, KV filed a petition in the SC against Nahin Kala Mine in Dehradun and got a victory through an SC judgement (relating to the overarching Doon mining petition filed by M.C. Mehta) for closing the mines in 1988.



Sriram Chemical gas leak, 1985; KV's investigations before and after the leak were a basis for a case in the Supreme Court

1990s

The discourse around social and environmental impacts of large projects that had started with Narmada, soon expanded to

³⁰ It involved Shekhar Singh, Usha Vaidyanathan and Ashish Kothari with help of Supreme Court advocate Madan Lokur, Delhi Science Forum's Probir Purkyastha and Indian Law Institute's Chhatrapati Singh. The RTI petition never got heard, but its contents and arguments were later used in the nation-wide movement for a RTI law.

other development projects. In 1990, a petition was filed against diversion of forest land in Sohna in Haryana. On April 24, 1990, a KV member (Ashish Kothari) went with the erstwhile Prime Minister, VP Singh, to Bastar to highlight the destructive impact of Bodh ghat hydroelectric project. Pranab Mukhopadhyay, Rohan D'Souza and Ashish Kothari conducted a study on the post-construction impacts of three large river valley projects: Hirakud (Orissa), Ukai (Gujarat), and Indira Gandhi Nahar Pariyojana (Rajasthan), with support of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). A report on this was finalised in 1994, and an article based on the report published in *Economic and Political Weekly* in 1998. A national study and campaign on mining in protected areas was also initiated in 1999.

Work on Narmada issues continued in the 1990s, leading to publications such as *Muddy Waters*, *River of Stories* and *The Environmental Aspects of the Sardar Sarovar Project*. However by 1996, the focus on Narmada had faded. In the Annual Report of 1995-1996, it was noted, 'Unfortunately, KV's support to the Andolan has waned over the last few years, as members who were previously very active have got involved in other activities, and new members appear not to be very enthusiastic about plunging into mass movement activity. Are we growing old?'

KV's involvement in Andaman and Nicobar issues, which had begun with *Treasured Islands*,³¹ led to a detailed study on

³¹ See the section on Environment Education.

logging and its ecological and cultural impact in the region. In 1993-1994, KV participated in the campaign led by Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology (SANE) for opposing reintroduction of European bass around the seas of the island. In 1999, along with two other NGOs (BNHS and SANE), KV filed a legal intervention in the Supreme Court to protect the Onge tribe from destruction. The intervention was later expanded to include various environmental issues of the Andaman and Nicobar islands.



Teacher's workshop with Treasured Island on Havelock Island, 2000 @ Pankaj Sekhsaria

2000s

In the first decade of 2000s, there was a focus on research and campaigning on environment and forest governance measures, including Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

notification, National Environment Policy, Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification, and others. In 2004, KV initiated and coordinated the Open Letter process with several dozen other civil society organisations, on these and other topics of environment-related decision-making. In 2005, KV collaborated with national and regional groups on the Campaign for Environment Justice-India (CEJI) related to the amendments to the EIA notification.

The study and campaign around mining in protected areas initiated in 1999 led to the publishing of *Undermining India: Impacts of Mining on Ecologically Sensitive Areas* in 2003. In May 2005, a report on *Eleven years of Environmental Impact Assessment* was published. National level action research and advocacy at the interface of environment and development also continued, with the team coming out with publications such as, *India's Notified Ecologically Sensitive Areas* and *Calling the Bluff: Revealing the state of Monitoring and Compliance of Environmental Clearance Conditions*. Members also made extensive use of the Right to Information Act, 2005 to track the processes at the central government level as well as gather information for local struggles.

Work on North-east Dams began 2001 onwards. A special issue of *Ecologist Asia* on North East dams was coordinated by three KV members (Manju Menon, Neeraj Vagholikar, Kanchi Kohli) as guest editors along with Ashish Fernandes of *Sanctuary Asia* in 2003. A dossier on Northeast dams, *Damming Northeast India* was published in 2005. Since 2003, members have either co-organised or participated as resource

persons in various capacity building programs on environment and legal issues by local groups in Northeast India, at times co-organised with youth or student groups. By 2004-05, KV actively tried to get attention to the impacts of the spate of hydel power projects in the Northeast on biodiversity as well as the overall way of giving environmental clearance to various development projects. It has also since then provided support to local groups in the Northeast regarding environmental and social aspects of dams and for advocacy at the regional and national levels regarding the same.



Lower Subansiri dam, Arunachal Pradesh, 2001 @ Neeraj Vagholikar

2010s

In 2011, members started an RTI Clearing House for supporting filing of RTI applications and a campaign desk on biodiversity and environment for advocacy, both of which

continued to be active till mid 2010s. The campaign desk conducted policy and legal research, and also provided technical and legal support in local specific issues in Bhadreshwar, Kutch (Gujarat), Jagatsinghpur (Odisha) and Raoghat (Chhattisgarh). A follow up study on Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESAs), *The Second Act: Centre-State Conversations on Ecologically Sensitive Areas (2009-2012)*, was published in 2012. Members conducted study on Compensatory Afforestation and Net Present Value as well as on India's Domestic Regulation and Climate Change leading to publication of *Pocketful of Forests: Legal debates on valuating and compensating forest loss in India* and *Banking on Forests* in 2011. A few members also briefly worked on highlighting issues of land grab by India in Ethiopia, in association with Oakland Foundation (USA) and some Ethiopian activists.

Advocacy on issues of ecological and socio-cultural impacts of dams in Northeast India has continued, coordinated by Neeraj Vagholikar. It involves a primary focus on the downstream impacts of hydropower projects on communities and sensitive ecosystems (including Important Bird Areas) in the Brahmaputra floodplains and high-altitude ecosystems in the Eastern Himalaya, and provision of technical support to enviro-legal advocacy by local groups on the same.

The involvement with Andaman and Nicobar also continued in the 2000s. The intervention filed by KV with two other NGOs led to SC orders for banning commercial logging and shutting

down the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR) road in 2002³². From 2003, a listserv on A&N issues was initiated, which continues till date, managed by Pankaj Sekhsaria. Post the Tsunami disaster, Kalpavriksh worked towards networking with other groups. In 2010, *The Jarawa Tribal Reserve Dossier* was co-published with UNESCO.

³² While logging was stopped, the ATR was never shut down.

Conservation and Livelihoods



Consultations on community conserved areas in Gadchiroli (Maharashtra), mid-1990s

Two *Padayatras* (footmarches) through Garhwal in 1980-81 helped the members understand the socio-environmental impacts and gender dimensions of deforestation in the hills, especially through interactions with activists of the Chipko movement.



KV padayatris in Tehri Garhwal, 1980

The trips were followed up by writing, slideshows, and fund-raising for a self-help mini-hydroelectricity project in one of Chamoli's villages. Shyamoli Chaudhuri Plassmann recalls:

I had the good luck to go on the first recce tour of the Tehri Garhwal Himalayas with Ashish Kothari and Sunita Narain in the spring of 1980, planning for the larger group which

would follow in the summer. We met Shri Sundarlal Bahuguna, and travelled from his ashram to that of Biharilal, and made a circuit back, via a small women's meeting planned especially for us. I drank in all the experiences insatiably. It was a whole new world, like the villages and trails in Manali, but with prolonged interaction with the villagers. With our guides, and with the generous hosts in the villages at which we stopped for the night, granted shelter in their thatched huts, and food at their wood fires. With the visit to both ashrams, we came to full knowledge of the different forms of activism, one a journeying *andolan*, of Sundarlal Ji, the other a stationary or *Sthir Andolan*, of Biharilalji. The exquisitely green cultivated farmland, the healthy cattle and goats, and the electric lights and water canals in the mini-hydel project, which also provided enough electricity to run the mechanised woodworking tools; a beautiful and productive design from an IIT student. I was deeply impressed. The women in the meeting enthralled us with their verve and sheer enthusiasm for change. And the songs from a local poet³³ were remarkably stirring.

³³ Ghanshyam Sailani, a well-known folk singer who coined the word 'Chipko' for the tree-hugging action that the movement got named after.



KV padayatris in Tehri Garhwal, 1981

Another formative experience was the shooting incident in Bharatpur. On November 7, 1982, seven people were killed in police firing at the bird sanctuary of Keoladeo Ghana in Bharatpur, Rajasthan, a favourite bird watching spot for many members. KV immediately sent a three-member team (Harish Dhawan, Ashok Prasad and D. Singh) to inquire into the incident. The team conclusively established that the root cause of the problem was the ban on grazing in the sanctuary. There were 197 villages in the area with 150,000 cattle and only 400 hectares of grazing grounds. The ban restricted the customary access of villagers to the sanctuary for grazing of livestock. The investigating team felt that the villagers' entry was justified considering that the ban had been imposed without making provisions for alternative fodder sources, thus endangering their very livelihood. The unprovoked firing

killed at least seven people including an old woman, shot by the police as they chased fleeing villagers. KV demanded release of all arrested persons, reopening of the sanctuary to cattle unless viable alternatives were provided and action against the guilty officials who ordered the firing. The report effectively repudiated the claims of the forest department that they fired in self defence. It was covered not only by the national newspapers but by most state dailies published in Rajasthan.

The investigation was the group's first brush with the people and parks issue, and through various debates and discussions evolved KV's stand that wildlife conservation could never be successful if it alienated local people. These aspects have been repeatedly highlighted by Kalpavriksh in its various articles, reports, and books, and became the foundation for its program on Conservation and Livelihoods in 1994. While struggling to save Delhi's greens, the group also continuously emphasised the need to provide the legitimate fuel and fodder requirements of low-income citizens.

KV was also part of a campaign against the proposed Forest Bill of 1980 as the bill identified local people as the destroyers of forests denying them their legitimate rights to collection of forest produce in any land declared as 'reserved', gave wide-ranging powers that could be misused to forest officials, and had hardly any provisions against the massive misuse of forests by contractors, industries and politicians. KV highlighted serious environmental implications of the bill. The

campaign was joined by a large number of environmental, civil rights and tribal organisations.

1990s

KV continued with its critique of the draft Forest Bill of 1980 and contributed to a nation-wide campaign to make it more people-friendly. Participation in global policy discourses also continued. Keeping in mind the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in 1992 in Rio De Janeiro and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), international networking and national follow up on the issue began. The team came out with a publication called *Conserving Life: Implications of the Biodiversity Convention for India*. KV's involvement in this issue was at various scales from regional to global.

By mid-1990s, it was facilitating preparation of a Community Biodiversity Register with Beej Bachao Andolan (BBA) of Jardhargaon in Tehri Garhwal area. It was also involved in highlighting BBA's efforts in various platforms and linking the initiative with consumer markets for organic produce. In the 'Man and Nature' public event of 1995, there was a KV-BBA stall on organic food and composting. KV members were also involved in watershed and seed revival work in Nahin Kala village in the late 1990s.



Bej Bachao Andolan with several Chipko activists, Nagani (Uttarakhand), 2010

The publication of *Protected Area Update*, a bi-monthly on conservation and livelihood issues started from 1994 onwards. The newsletter was originally titled Joint Protected Area Management Update and emerged from a meeting on ‘Exploring Joint Protected Area Management’ in September 1994. Mostly edited by Pankaj Sekhsaria and evolving over time, the PA Update is still going strong in the 2020s. In March 1995, some members participated in the Jungle Jeevan Bachao Yatra (Save Forest Life Rally) of 45 days, through 16 protected areas (PA) in western, central, and northern India, in association with Tarun Bharat Sangh, Ekta Parishad, Sanctuary Asia, Centre for Environment Education, IIPA, Maharashtra Arogya Mandal, Vikalp, and others. The *Yatra* brought human rights and conservation groups together on one platform which

till then didn't speak with each other. Farhad Vania (Bingo) was a *yatri* for the entire 40 day period. During this process, KV stayed in one or two government rest houses along the way leading to accusations by a prominent Delhi-based NGO of collaborating with the state. At the same time, KV explicitly critiqued the government's conservation policy relating to exclusion of local communities, a position that was reinforced through subsequent central participation of KV members in documentation and advocacy on PA governance issues.

Several members of KV were involved in an IIPA project on people and protected areas, supported by IIED. IIED provided support for the second phase as a consultancy to KV on a project called 'Community Based Wildlife Management in South Asia'. The key members involved in the project had moved to Pune and the consultancy provided for some of the initial office expenses for the KV Pune office. The project led to detailed ethnographic studies in Mendha, Jardhargaon and Arvari, thematic papers on community conservation and the publication of *Where Communities Care* in 1999. This series of case studies led to the interest in documenting the many examples of community conservation. The process of documentation was started with a small grant from MoEF in 1999, eventually leading to the publishing of a directory on Community Conserved Areas (CCAs).

Between 1997 and 1999, KV was involved in organising the annual National Consultations on Wildlife Conservation and People's Livelihood Rights called 'Building Bridges', in association with several wildlife and social activist groups. By

this time, it had also initiated research and involvement in community-based conservation (CBC) and natural resource governance initiatives. Members coordinated a South Asian survey on this topic. In 1998, KV initiated a 5-year assessment of biodiversity of Amba Valley (Maharashtra), in relation to the watershed development program of Rural Communes. The process led to the creation of a 102 page long People's Biodiversity Register. Between 1999 and 2001, members were involved in an assessment of links between environment and tribal self-rule initiatives and a study of natural resource conflicts, in association with Lokayan. In 1999, KV became the coordinator of a national Conservation and Livelihoods Network, aiming to bridge the gap between conservationists, wildlife officials, social activists, and villagers. KV was a member of the working group to draft the National Wildlife Action Plan 2002-2020.

At a global level, KV became a co-chairperson and member of the Secretariat for the Theme on Governance, Equity, Livelihoods, and Protected Areas (TILCEPA), an international network of the IUCN (The International Union for Conservation of Nature) World Commission on Protected Areas and Commission on Environmental, Economic, and Social Policy. Through its advocacy, it was instrumental in getting Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) recognised in the National Wildlife Action Plan, and into the proposed amendments to the Wild Life (Protection) Act and at global levels in the IUCN and CBD.



KV facilitating community participation at World Parks Congress, Durban 2003

2000s

In early 2000s, KV took on the herculean collaborative exercise of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) commissioned by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (Government of India), funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The process focused on producing a series of action plans on various aspects of biodiversity: conservation, sustainable use, and equity involving several tens of thousands of people from government and civil society. It came out with numerous action plans at local, state, inter-state (eco-regional) and thematic levels, in addition to thematic papers on a range of topics related to biodiversity. With an overall focus on ecological and

livelihood security, a vast array of issues were covered such as threatened ecosystems and species, indigenous seed and livestock diversity, the economics and valuation of biological resources, ethical and spiritual links of humans and nature, the livelihood rights of fisherfolk, farmers, adivasis, and pastoralists, land and resource tenure patterns, and development and governance patterns affecting biodiversity and nature.



NBSAP event in Yuksom, Sikkim, 2001

The NBSAP planning process was distinguished by its large-scale, democratic and civil society driven character. The experience also provided insights into the functionings of the larger political framework since MoEF, despite sanctioning the process itself, refused to approve and release the final National

Plan, indicating a certain level of political resistance to decentralised and inclusive processes and to substantive recommendations pointing to the need for fundamental economic and political transformations. KV itself released the final technical report (FTR) of NBSAP as a people's plan in October 2005 after several months of attempts to get the MoEF to release it. To capture the unique process of NBSAP, *Process Documentation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan – India* was published in 2006. Positive outcomes of the process included creation of new partnerships, incorporation of several points from the final technical report into proposals for the 11th Five Year Plan, the publication of and consideration of several state action plans for implementation, and generation of awareness through various events and media coverage. It also led to networking, collaborations and new partnerships.

From 2001, KV began collaborating with Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN) to work on trade, biodiversity, farmer rights, biopiracy, intellectual property rights and traditional knowledge. In 2004, as a part of this collaboration, a national Campaign on Community Control over Biodiversity was initiated, a listserv called BioDWatch getting set up in 2007 for tracking implementation of the Biological Diversity Act or BDA. As an outcome of the collaboration, a three-book 'information pack' on BDA and Intellectual property rights was released in 2006 composing of *Understanding the Biological Diversity Act 2002- a dossier*, *A Guide to the Biological Diversity Act 2002* and *A Simple Guide to Intellectual Property Rights, Biodiversity and Traditional*

Knowledge. KV members were also part of the framing of the Biological Diversity Act and advocacy regarding its rules.

As a spin-off from a Kalpavriksh Conservation Education (CE) project funded by FES, The Malnad Home Garden and Seed Exchange Collective in Sirsi came into being in 2001 with the NBSAP Biodiversity Mela in Sirsi. While the project itself looked at the sort of CE inputs that would work in the ecologically and culturally very unique Malnad region of Karnataka's Western Ghats, the seed collective initiative began as a non-formal way of learning and involving women as vital sources of information and teaching directly from their homes.



Sirsi biodiversity mela (NBSAP), 2001

Although the project soon wrapped up, nonetheless, the project coordinator and KV member, Sunita Rao, who had in the

meanwhile settled on her own forest farm near the town of Sirsi in the Malnad region, was able to continue the seed collective initiative with the help and involvement of the local community. In 2008, the collective registered as a trust and was called Vanastree (“women of the forest”). The collective works independently of KV.

Meanwhile, national consultations on wildlife conservation and people’s livelihood rights continued to be organised. The Conservation and Livelihoods Network (CLN) was formalised in 2000 and its members were involved in preparing a draft set of guidelines in the settlement process of PAs for the Maharashtra Govt. This was also the time when the PA Update (#24) was printed for the first time (April 2000) and KV came out with two new publications- *Joint Protected Area Management: A Simple Guide- How it will benefit Wildlife and People*, in 2000; and *Protected Areas in India: A Profile*, in 2001. It actively lobbied against some of the provisions of the Wildlife Protection (Amendment) Act (2002) and raised concerns on the provisions regarding the new categories of Protected areas (namely Community Reserve and Conservation Reserve) which involve local people in conservation. The Future of Conservation (FoC) network began on September 4, 2004 through a meeting at Wildlife Trust of India. The network was an attempt with several partners to revive the Conservation and Livelihoods Network in a new *avatar* of FoC, with two national meetings in 2006 and 2007, joint campaigns, inputs to government, and advocacy. In 2009, the team carried out a study of relocation from Protected Areas, supported by UNESCO.

Work on the CCA directory project, which had been initiated in 1999 was in full swing in the early 2000s. Simultaneously, in 2000-01, a study of community based sea turtle conservation was undertaken. From 2005 onwards there was a focus on CCAs in Nagaland and Orissa and in 2006, a series on Community Based Conservation was initiated in *Hornbill* magazine. The process of documentation lasted over a decade, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes supported by partner organisations like FES and Vasundhara. The term CCAs was also coined for the directory and a set of criteria by which to identify CCAs for documentation were also arrived at in discussion with many national and international actors and organisations. *Community Conserved Areas- A Directory* was published in 2009.

KV keenly followed the developments leading to the enactment of the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, including participation in public meetings relating to formulation of rules under it. After its enforcement through rules in 2008, KV has been active in tracking the implementation of the Act through newsletters, training grassroots on its implications and in regional and national advocacy around its provisions. KV played a role along with others in ensuring that a circular was issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in 2009 to incorporate the process of seeking gram sabha's consent before the diversion of forests.

As part of Theme on Governance, Equity, Livelihoods, and Protected Areas (TILCEPA), KV was involved in coordination

of the People and Equity theme in World Parks Congress (2003) and facilitated participation of several community representatives in the international gathering. KV was also instrumental in including Governance as a key element of the CBD Protected Areas Programme of Work (2004), and introduction of the concept of CCAs into international policies of the IUCN and the CBD's Programme of Work on Protected Areas. In 2004, KV published *Participatory Conservation: Paradigm Shifts in International Policy*. From 2007 to 2012, KV hosted and serviced the funds of the CBD Alliance, an international network of civil society organisations that KV had helped set up in 2002, for monitoring developments around the Convention of Biological Diversity. As part of this role, it facilitated advocacy and participation of indigenous and civil society persons in CBD related meetings.



ICCA Consortium 15th General Assembly - Udaipur, Rajasthan, 2019

In 2008, KV, along with several other organisations, initiated the ICCA Consortium at the 4th World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain. Since then, it has stayed an active core group member of the Consortium, which has played an important role at the international level in highlighting the value and significance of community-led conservation. KV became the South Asia coordinator of the Consortium in 2010.

Although KV carried out case studies at various sites and regularly engaged with the communities at several of its field sites, its engagement with villages in and around Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary since 2007 has been one of the few long term sustained grass-roots level interventions.



Women's livelihoods and self-group in Bhimashankar, Maharashtra, 2019

The overall goal was to help facilitate an inclusive conservation governance and management in these villages by supporting local people's rights and responsibilities towards surrounding forests and biodiversity, including through implementation of the FRA. Complementing this, an environment education programme for children was started in Bhimashankar in 2008 to encourage local efforts for conservation.

2010s

In early 2010s, team members along with GRAIN, continued to pay attention to Biodiversity Management Committees and Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) mechanisms, leading to publication of *Common Concerns* and *The Balancing Act*. Comments were provided on the draft ABS guidelines. KV also continued coordinating the BioDwatch listserv for several years. Technical and legal support in local specific issues was provided to groups working in Bhadreshwar in Kutch (Gujarat), Jagatsinghpur (Odisha) and Raoghat (Chhattisgarh). The Campaign Desk on Community Control on Biodiversity also responded to queries on BDA including from government departments till early 2010s.

KV has continued its advocacy on issues of forest rights, with a particular attention to community forest rights, protected area governance, and forest diversion. In 2011, through a national brainstorming meeting on Community Forest Rights, it was decided that a CFR Learning and Advocacy network would be formed, initially coordinated by Kalpavriksh and Vasundhara. This led to a series of case studies (for example Melghat,

Tadoba, Kalu Dam in 2013) and several issues of *Citizen's Report on Community Forest Rights* over the years. Since that time, KV has also been involved in sustained Maharashtra level advocacy on forest rights and documentation of post-recognition processes.



Community gathering on Forest Rights Act in Odisha

The team has also done a few sessions on FRA provisions for claiming CFR rights and consent related to forest diversion in North-east India. Through its documentation and outreach centre, KV has produced numerous detailed policy briefs on different aspects of FRA and other intersecting laws. In 2016, KV was part of the team which prepared the national report evaluating the *Promise and Performance on FRA* in the last one decade. In 2018, there was a change in CFR-LA structure, leading it to be composed of an advisory committee and an

executive committee. By 2019, KV decided to reduce its engagement with the CFR-LA and the network has not been quite active since then.

Through numerous petitions and reports, KV has tried to highlight the problems related to FRA processes and violations in Protected Area governance, including comments on the guidelines for critical tiger habitats and critical wildlife habitats. In response to the illegal notification of buffers of tiger reserve in 2012, it filed an intervention in the Supreme Court in the matter of Ajay Dubey vs. NTCA and Others (which was unfortunately never heard). KV has also been involved in giving inputs for CFR process to various grassroots organisations working in Protected Areas like BRT Tiger Reserve, Sariska, Askot sanctuary, Melghat Tiger Reserve, Yawal Wildlife Sanctuary, Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary and Corbett Tiger Reserve. It has supported Lok Sangharsh Morcha (LSM) in development of village-level micro plans for co-existence within and around Yawal Wildlife Sanctuary. In 2014-15, it also helped in documentation of post-rights management plans for 50 villages in Maharashtra under a UNDP project being coordinated by Vidarbha Livelihood Network. Building upon the work done on relocation from Tiger Reserves since around 2009, it started creating a database of 30 protected areas to understand the expansion, relocation and displacement processes and implementation of FRA in protected areas in 2016. *PA Update* celebrated its 25 years in late 2019 and published its first issue of Marathi PA Update in March-April 2020. The newsletter has been used to produce two compilations - *State of Wildlife in North-east*

India (1996-2011) and The State of Wildlife and Protected Areas in Maharashtra (1996-2015).

The ICCA Consortium was formalised in 2010, with KV as one of its founding members. It has been involved in bringing out many international policy documents and representing issues related to community conserved areas in various national and international meetings. KV being part of both, the ICCA Consortium and CBD alliance, these issues were particularly represented through side-events, presentations and public statements during the CBD-COP-11 in 2012 which was organised in Hyderabad.

In 2012, a report of case studies and analyses on *Community Conserved Areas in South Asia* was published. At the national level, members have maintained contact with CCAs in Assam, Nagaland, Mendha Lekha. Of late, the team has been focusing on providing effective legal support to existing CCAs and creating conditions for emergence of newer CCAs, including through the implementation of the Forest Rights Act.

KV's engagement in and around Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary became more extensive and deeper during this decade. The team has been continuing to facilitate different activities in line with the capacity building of local communities for their local and forest governance, with a growing focus on women's participation. During this decade, the work expanded in 7 villages over a broadening range of activities.

The team facilitated filing of seven claims for Community Forest Rights, amongst which 2 villages, Kharpud and Bhomale (Upper), have received titles. Members started work on protection and conservation of Indian honey bee, *Apis Cerana*, and their habitats along with the livelihoods of local honey harvesters. They have also started working with local farmers on the conservation of local seed diversity and techniques for sustainable agriculture. KV organised several biodiversity festivals and local seed festivals to spread more awareness about the importance of wild food and local seed diversity. The primary coordinator for this work has been Pradeep Chavan.



Children's book reading to adivasi kids in Bhimashankar, Maharashtra, 2017

There have also been other activities within the conservation and livelihoods theme. The listserv on Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) continues to date, supplemented by a more recently set up Facebook group. In June 2011, a legal notice was sent to the A&N administration asking why legal proceedings should not be initiated for non-implementation of SC orders for closure of the Andaman Trunk Road, though KV could not pursue this subsequently. In 2013, there was a study on crop damage by rhesus macaques in Jardhargaon. In 2018, a Biodiversity Assessment and Conservation Priority Plan was formulated for Sahyadri School Campus.



Environment Education

KV members ran nature clubs in several schools and colleges and organised bird-watching, nature walks, treks, environment awareness sessions, exhibitions and slide-shows. With many of KV's members themselves having emerged from involvement in environmental education activities like the WWF's Nature Clubs programme, they fully understood the value of such activities. Relevant published material was also produced and disseminated. This included a newsletter called 'Nature',³⁴ started in 1979 as 'Echoes of the Wild' that continued till 1987. Members also published occasional articles in the mainstream media and issued press releases for greater public outreach of issues and campaigns taken up by KV. A large format poster exhibition on Delhi's environment was handmade and put up in several schools.

As the 1980s progressed, environmental awareness sessions in educational institutions and trips within/around Delhi also continued. In 1984, a workshop organised by KV in St. Columba's School brought together a group of teachers, students and others concerned with environment education, which in 1986 coalesced into the School Environment Network of Delhi, coordinated by Keerti Jayaram of Ramjas College. KV collaborated with the network for several environment education activities though by the late 1980s, the relationship with the network had weakened.

³⁴ The first issue of *Nature's* hindi counterpart, 'Aranya', edited by Suresh Sharma and Shashank Hedao, finally came out in 1986. Unfortunately the newsletter could not sustain itself for too long.

In 1989, KV began its involvement in the environmental problems of Andaman and Nicobar Islands in collaboration with the Andaman Nicobar Environment Team or ANET. At the request of ANET, KV began work on its first localised education module with the objective of facilitating teachers in providing context-specific and place-based environment education to the students residing in the Andaman and Nicobar islands.



Teacher's group along with some Kalpavriksh's members, 2000 @ Pankaj Sekhsaria

1990s

KV's work on education material for Andaman and Nicobar led to the development of an environment education handbook, *Treasured Islands*, in 1996. The handbook, which was co-published with ANET and also translated in Hindi, was

developed for educators to help create interest and enthusiasm among local students about the island's biological and cultural diversity.

By 1992, efforts for developing environmental education material for Lakshadweep began which culminated in production of the manual *Nammuda Dweep Lakshadweep* by late 1990s. In 1999, a two week session of education activities with thematic focus on conservation, livelihoods, and development was conducted in Pune and Uttar Kannada for students from the USA as part of an effort called 'the Global Ecology Program'.

2000s

In 2000, an environment education project was initiated in Uttara Kannada involving conducting teachers' workshops, setting up Malnad (or Malenadu) Home Garden and Seed Exchange Collective and organising biodiversity festivals. While the focus of the Education programme was on exploring conservation education inputs that would work in the ecologically and culturally unique Malnad region of Karnataka's Western Ghats, the seed collective initiative began as a non-formal way of learning and involving women as vital sources of information and teaching right from their homes. It evolved into the women's collective of Vanastree, which now works independent of Kalpavriksh.

In 2004, a Conservation Education programme was initiated in Biligiri Rangaswamy hills of Karnataka with Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (VGKK) School and Ashoka Trust

for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE). The objective of the program was to develop a relevant conservation education programme for all levels from primary to high school to be implemented in the VGKK school. As part of the programme, *Forests Alive!* A handbook for teachers was developed, which explores a range of issues that are relevant to the lives of the Soligas Adivasi community within the BRT wildlife sanctuary. It also has a number of activities that the teachers could use to help children become more aware, sensitive, and proud of their culture and natural heritage. The content of the Handbook was discussed over several workshops with the teachers of the school, where decisions were also taken as to what topics would be dealt with at each level. *Vana Sanjeevana*, a Kannada translation of the handbook, was published by Navakarnataka Publishers.

In 2005, the Snow Leopard Conservancy-India Trust (SLC-IT) invited some members of Kalpavriksh to help develop and implement an environment education programme for school children of upper primary and middle school levels. This was because a need was felt for more focused efforts to raise awareness amongst children about the environment with specific focus on Ladakh's biodiversity and the conservation of snow leopards. The Snow Leopard Conservation Education Programme was a collaborative effort between SLC-IT and Kalpavriksh for an environment education programme in Ladakh, focused on the conservation of Snow leopards and other wildlife of the local trans-Himalayan region. The programme was implemented in many schools in Leh and Kargil districts and were a diverse mix of government and

private schools, some accessible by road and others that were not. During this phase a number of educational resources and activities were developed as well as local youth employed as environment educators.



An outdoor energiser activity, Zanskar, 2007 @ Sujatha Padmanabhan

By 2010, all the material that was developed for the programme was published as a resource kit called *Ri Gyancha: a biodiversity resource kit for educators in Ladakh* and released by His Holiness The Dalai Lama and by Jairam Ramesh then Minister of Environment and Forests. This resource kit provides a locale-specific environment education programme for those interested in Ladakh, especially its wildlife. In 2008, KV and SLC-IT published its first story book for children, *The Ghost of the Mountains*, about

human-wildlife conflicts with the snow leopard. Within a few years, Eklavya translated and published the story in Hindi and Himalayan Trust translated and published it in Nepali.



School teachers try out the 'Leaf Zoo' activity at a teacher training programme held at Likir, Ladakh, 2011 @ Sujatha Padmanabhan

Starting in 2007, Kalpavriksh hosted students from America as part of their study tour, the International Honors Program – Rethinking Globalisation (IHP-RG), conducted by the Boston University. This course was for selected students to travel across several countries to study the impact of globalisation and its alternatives. KV conceptualised and executed their program in Pune, which consisted of workshops on relevant topics by various speakers, field trips and organising homestays with families for the students to experience the

cultural ethos of the place. The topics covered included biodiversity, community-based conservation, sustainable agriculture, urban environmental issues, education and creative learning, and development projects like big dams. This engagement continued for a couple of years.

In 2008, an environment education programme was initiated in and around the Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary in Maharashtra. A strong need was felt for a site-specific education programme for the school children and teachers, and Kalpavriksh was approached by the Forest Department to carry out a sustained intervention in the schools. The environment education programme was implemented at the Terungun and Tokawade Ashram schools in Bhimashankar area through workshops conducted by Kalpavriksh members and other resource persons who were identified through Maharashtra Arogya Mandal (MAM). Local youth were trained as environment educators, to ensure continuity of the programme beyond the project phase. The training sessions were conducted in Pune as well as in Bhimashankar.

In 2002, KV began linking with Vidya Jyoti, a school for special children, organising sessions on environment education and inviting some of its students to its office to work as volunteers. This relationship continued for several years. Members also raised awareness on environmental issues by writing for children in various newspapers and magazines such as Chandamama, Deccan Herald, Maharashtra Herald and Hindu Young World. Kalpavriksh coordinated a series of articles or stories in these newspapers and magazines.

2010s

The Education team continued its work on creating locale specific modules. The education programme in Bhimashankar culminated in a Marathi handbook on Western Ghats *Sahyadri Nisargacha Anamol Theva* published by Sakaal in 2014. This book offers information on various aspects like ecosystems, biodiversity, threats and conservation measures with specific focus on the Sahyadri region in Maharashtra. *Circle of Life*, about the life cycle of a bee, was developed for the children of honey harvesters in Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary. A bilingual (English and Marathi) field guide designed for quick and easy field identification of some of the common species of lizards and amphibians in Western Maharashtra titled *A Field Guide to Lizards and Amphibians of Western Maharashtra* was developed and published by KV in 2015.

In this last decade, there were some synergies between the Alternatives theme and the Education work. In 2014, Sujatha Padmanabhan of the education team co-authored *Imlee Mahuaa: Learning in Freedom the Democratic Way*, an education-related case study on a school in Chhattisgarh, as a part of an Alternatives project. In 2015, work on a children's book on alternatives in food was started, leading to the publication of *Something to Chew On* in 2016.

As a follow up of the Ladakh environment education programme, Kalpavriksh was involved in supporting the dissemination of *Ri Gyancha* through teacher training in Kargil district, private schools in Leh district as well as in Spiti. A revised version of the resource kit was printed in 2013. In

2017, on request from SLC-IT, KV became involved with work on a food book similar to *Something to Chew On* that was localised to the Ladakh region. After two field visits, the book *Dhontang* was released in Ladakh in 2019.

Kalpavriksh collaborated with NGOs in Kachchh (Sahjeevan and Kachchh Nav Nirman Abhiyan and Khamir) from 2012 to 2015 to develop localised environmental education material for children in the district. This work was funded by Reach to Teach.



A session in Kachchh for kids using the material developed, 2014 @ Sujatha Padmanabhan

Two story books were published as a part of this process. The books *Khari Journeys through Kachchh* and *Shero to the Rescue* are about the wildlife and ecosystems of the remote

and diverse region of Kachchh. They were published in Gujarati and English to support the educational interventions being run in Kachchh by local NGOs. Apart from the two storybooks, KV produced ecosystem and wildlife posters, five games and a set of 32 reading cards about local plants and animals. All materials were field tested.

In collaboration with Last Wilderness Foundation, KV developed two games (Jungle Dominoes and Wildlife Bingo) and *Secrets of the Jungle*, an activity book for children on the flora and fauna of Central India. The resource materials were jointly published with LWF in Hindi and English in 2016.



KV books at the Joy of Reading Festival at Roing in Arunachal Pradesh, 2018 @ Lohit Libraries

Since 2017, KV has collaborated with Tata Trust on the Parag Initiative that supports development and dissemination of children's literature. A wide diversity of fiction and non-fiction books has been published for children on the themes of wildlife, nature and environment. Outreach for these books is done through direct sales, distribution, reading events, literature festivals and reading apps. Many of the titles have been published in Tibetan, Telugu, Kannada, Hindi, Nepali and Marathi through collaborations with regional language publishers (in the case of Tibetan, it is the education dept. of the Tibetan Govt in exile). Some of the books have won awards and some have been shortlisted for them.

A small special event undertaken by KV in this last decade was a week-long Monsoon School on Perspectives on Environment, Society and Well-being organised from 17th-23rd June 2014 at United World College, Mulshi. The resource persons included Kalpavriksh members and also persons from outside. Participation was diverse and included students from various universities, professors and persons working in NGOs.

The education team has therefore continued its work on promoting locale-based education. It has also often brought synergy by connecting with teams working on different focus areas to bring out creative outputs. Workshops with teachers, youth and children as well as maintaining regular newspaper columns of nature-writing for children has also continued. Over time, it has come out with an impressive collection of

children's storybooks connected to issues of wildlife, environment and society.



Books for kids on wildlife and nature... collage @ Tanya Majmudar



Urban Environment

Indraprastha Power Station, Delhi, in 1980s

The 1979 ridge protest with its 250-300 participants started a long-drawn process of citizen engagement on the issue of protecting urban green areas in Delhi. Favourable media coverage of the rally, increasing citizen's pressure and finally a memorandum presented to the Prime Minister in 1980 helped in getting the Ridge and other green areas declared 'Protected Forests'.



Demonstration against destruction of Delhi Ridge forest, 1979

But sadly like many government notifications, this remained partly on paper. Encroachments, legal and illegal, have continued since then, often directly or indirectly involving the Delhi Administration itself; the confusion exacerbated by the multiplicity of the organisations controlling the ridge. KV was instrumental in bringing to the notice of the Administration the constant violation of the city's environmental laws. At one

point, in October 1980, the members resorted to sitting in front of bulldozers that were brought in to raze a wild area in Chanakyapuri, shaming the authorities into admitting its 'Protected' status, and finally getting it fenced off to proper protection. The group protested against the tree-cutting for road-widening for ASIAD (the Asian games) in 1982, commercial constructions near green areas and conversion of wilderness into manicured parks; advocating tree planting using native species where possible.



Cycle rally against water and air pollution in Delhi, early 1980s

Through the 1980s, bird counts were carried out twice a year in various parts of Delhi; and in 1988, the first round of bird count analysis was done 'using the 21st century technology of computers'. Prabhakar Rao, a KV member who has continued to track urban green issues in Delhi till late 2010s, got

associated with KV in early 1989 after approaching them with a complaint about tree-guards.

1990s

In 1991 *Delhi Ridge: Decline and Conservation*, was published in English, along with the bird-watching guide *What's the Bird: Guide to Birdwatching, with special reference to Delhi*. A Hindi translation of *Delhi Ridge* was published in 1997. The campaign was subsequently expanded to green areas in various parts of Delhi, and against indiscriminate tiling as part of the Free the Trees campaign. The publication, *Saving Delhi's Green Areas: A Citizens' Guide*, was brought out in 1994. In 1995, KV published a guidebook for Delhi called *The Little Green Guide* which was aimed at students and people wanting to work in environmental organisations. Prabhakar Rao recollects:

'The motivation to join KV was to have backup support for the work I was doing at that time. Individual voices were not taken note of. With KV school programmes, we were able to effectively reach out to Government departments through appeals by children. Children's appeals in large numbers were never ignored by Government officials. Since I was involved with urban green issues, children could relate easily with this. I miss school programmes very much. Involvement with KV, certainly helped me to appreciate differing viewpoints. KV involvement was in so many areas that I, being a nature lover, could find solace at the end of the day. Along with my college work, KV work was a good supplement. It was rather funny that Government officials would attend our KV meetings. The petition on trees against

the departments was finalised after sharing the details with them. They in fact improved some portions of the petition! This could happen only in KV.'

2000s

With the shift of several members to Pune, KV also began getting involved in local issues in Pune, including tree-felling, proposed spraying of weedicide to control hyacinth in the river, campaign to replace plastic carry-bags with cloth bags. The Signs of Hope lecture series which had been initiated during KV's 20th anniversary, continued for several years in Pune, bringing various alternative movements and initiatives to public attention. Two publications - *Birds of Pune* and *Pune Green Guide: Guide to Environmental Opportunities in Pune* were produced in 2001. By 2004, it was involved in the safe festivals campaign, vermicomposting demonstrations and organic food marketing. As a part of the safe festivals campaign, it was involved in trying out natural colours for Holi with the women farmers of Vanastree and marketing the same in Pune and other cities. The positive response to the campaign led to the emergence of a social enterprise called eCoexist in 2006, which took forward the marketing work for eco-friendly products independently, with the permission of the KV team. The Eco-mela, organised in December 2004 as part of KV's 25th anniversary celebrations, was aimed at creating awareness about Pune's biodiversity.



Eco-mela on KV's 25th anniversary, held in Pune (Maharashtra)

In 2005, Pune Tree Watch was formalised by KV and in 2007, the citizen action group was involved in various citizen mobilisation activities to save trees and plant trees in Pune with citizens, politicians, city administration, army and private companies. Most of the activities were done under the umbrage of the Maharashtra (Urban Areas) Protection and Preservation of Trees Act, 1975. A citizen's guide for tree protection, *The Green Vein*, was published in 2007. KV member, Tasneem Balasinorwala, served as a member in the Pune Tree Authority in The Pune Municipal Corporation, her term ending in 2011.

Meanwhile participation in issues of Delhi greens also continued. In 2000, KV published *Butterflies of Delhi*. In 2005, a petition was filed on tiling and tree-felling in Delhi High Court and an ‘Urban Green’ Project started to consolidate these activities. In 2007, KV participated in Trees for Delhi campaign to save thousands of trees slated for felling for bus rapid transport system.

2010s

KV’s activities in Delhi have steadily declined over the years. Due to there being hardly any members working full-time on KV projects in Delhi, the Delhi office had to be shut down in 2012. Yet, some ‘urban environment’ activities continue.



Briefing media about de-tiling action by KV, early 1990s

KV was an official member of the Tree Authority, constituted under The Delhi Preservation Of Trees Act, 1994 till 2010. It has also been involved as a co-petitioner in an ongoing NGT case on the matter of concretisation of pavements and impact of de-concretising on trees.

A booklet based on the Delhi Urban Green project, *Managing Urban Green Areas in Delhi*, was created in 2013-14. In individual capacity, one of the Delhi Urban Green members (Prabhakar Rao) has been continuing work in Zakir Husain Delhi College on nursery establishment, seed collection, rooftop solar panels, careful e-waste disposal and millet-based food in the canteen. In 2017-18, KV was a part of the informal coalition that raised concerns about the felling of trees and commercialisation of public spaces by proposed redevelopment projects in New Delhi. Working with the Forest Department, it was possible to audit compensatory plantations within the National Capital Region (NCR) by Delhi Metro and other private parties. In 2013, there was an initiation, with 5 other CSOs, of Alternatives Forum Pune, as a platform for dialogue and outreach on alternative initiatives and actions for/with Pune-based groups. This continued to be coordinated by KV till the end of 2015.

Alternatives



Vikalp Sangam exhibition on alternatives, put up on occasion of Maharashtra Vikalp Sangam, Sevagram



2010s

One marked addition in this last decade has been a more focused attention to research and advocacy on alternatives to the predominant development paradigm. The origin of this theme can be said to lie partly in earlier work on conservation and agricultural alternatives, and then in the book *Churning the Earth* (Penguin, 2012), co-authored by Aseem Srivastava with KV member Ashish Kothari. This book focused on impacts of globalisation in India with ideas for looking towards alternatives. Other team members joined the process, leading to the formalisation of Alternatives as a fifth theme for KV, in 2014.



Tamil Nadu Vikalp Sangam, 2015

A process called Vikalp Sangam (VS) or Alternatives Confluence was initiated through a planning meeting of

like-minded organisations on 31st January, 2014, with the objective of documenting, highlighting, bringing together for sharing, collaborating and collective visioning of the various initiatives and movements for alternatives across the country.

A core group of organisations and individuals committed to the process was formed. Since the first sangam at Timbaktu in September 2014, numerous thematic and regional sangams have been organised on diverse subjects such as decentralised renewable energy, food, health, alternative economics, youth, peace-building, democracy, well-being and justice. Although for the most part, KV has been a primary coordinator, several other groups have also stepped forward and begun to take central responsibility in coordinating certain processes, as part of a Facilitation Team.



Field trip to Saboo during Ladakh Vikalp Sangam, 2015

A common part for most of these sangams has been discussions on a conceptual framework for alternatives, thereby leading to a continuous revision and evolution of a note entitled 'In Search of Radical Alternatives'.

Apart from the VS gatherings, the process has led to creation of a website (which has at present 1500+ stories), a thriving google group with 700+ members, commissioning of stories and detailed studies, and creation of posters for a travelling exhibition. At the local level of Pune, regular sessions for discussing alternative initiatives were conducted from mid 2013 to 2016 through a platform called Alternative Forum Pune, of which KV was a coordinating member. Many short films on alternatives, commissioned to Video Volunteers, Srishti school of Design and Art and independent artists, have also been created since 2016. The initial case studies have been compiled as *Ecologies of Hope and Transformation*, published in 2018. A compilation of essays envisioning futures for different realms of life (education, health, conservation, Adivasis, food & agriculture, gender, etc) was initiated in 2016 and published in 2017 as *Alternative Futures: India Unshackled* (ed. by Ashish Kothari and K.J. Joy, Pub. Authors UpFront). Posters on alternatives created for a travelling exhibition were printed in the form of a booklet in Hindi and English. In mid-2017, KV entered into a formal 3-year collaboration with Azim Premji University (APU) for generating teaching resources and engaging students and faculty in documentation and research on alternatives.

Simultaneously, there have been processes at the international level. In 2012, a treaty on Radical Ecological Democracy was suggested by Ashish Kothari as part of an ongoing civil society process to negotiate ‘People’s Sustainability Treaties’, for discussion and action at the Rio+20 conference. The Radical Ecological Democracy blog was started in 2013 and evolved into a website in 2017. Kalpavriksh members were part of the team involved in collating and editing *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (Tulika and Authors UpFront, 2019), with 110 essays, mostly on radical alternative worldviews, concepts and practices in various parts of the world. Ten essays from this book were published as a booklet, *Dimensions of Democracy*, in English and Hindi. From 2016 onwards, KV became co-coordinator (with Institut de Ciència i Tecnologia Ambientals or ICTA, Barcelona) of a global project, Academic-Activist Co-generation of Knowledge on Environmental Justice (ACKnowl-EJ). This project aimed to take further ICTA’s work on mapping and analysing environmental justice and conflict cases worldwide, (EJ Atlas), including through the addition of positive transformation initiatives, cases of ‘Rights of Nature’ and a global dialogue on alternative worldviews. Within this process, the previously mentioned alternatives framework note arising from the Vikalp Sangam process, led to the development of an Alternatives Transformation Format which arose out of a need to gain more in-depth understanding of alternative transformations. For understanding grounded transformations, detailed studies were undertaken related to forest-based and self-rule transformation among the Gond Adivasi in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra, revival of handloom weaving and its economic, socio-cultural, and

ecological impacts in Kachchh, and Raika pastoralist worldviews (especially women's) in Rajasthan.

Building on the experience of Vikalp Sangam, Kalpavriksh member Ashish Kothari had proposed a global confluence of alternatives, at the International Degrowth Conference in Budapest in 2016. After a round of consultations regarding the desirability and feasibility of such a process, including preliminary meetings at international gatherings, in mid 2019, it was decided to launch Global Tapestry of Alternatives (GTA), a process and a platform that aims to gradually weave together the various networks and movements towards radical alternatives around the world.

ALIVE, EXISTING AND CO-BECOMING

For over 40 years, Kalpavriksh has continued to exist in the environmental and socio-political non-profit space. In this time it has shaped and been shaped by the people who have been a part of it, and by the groups, movements and people it has collaborated with. We end this account of KV history with a scattering of thoughts shared by a few KV members on what has kept KV alive and what the future may hold.



KV old and new members at 40th anniversary gathering, Kolad (Maharashtra), 2019

According to Seema Bhatt, who was part of the Delhi Ridge Protest and became a member some time later, what has kept KV alive for 40 years is “this very passion that is palpable even to the younger generation that are joining KV today. The atmosphere of camaraderie, shared beliefs and the optimism of

making a difference is what keeps KV going. KV has changed, as all of us who were in school and college when it was founded grew older, greyer but perhaps none the wiser! But there is still that childish delight in each one of us. It is that which binds us all. There is however a need for KV to grow and change according to developments in the larger context.”

Sujatha Padmanabhan, who joined KV in 1984, notes that “KV has been an open organisation and has provided a platform for like-minded individuals to work together. It has also been a flexible platform - the flexibility has helped to keep it alive. The fact that it has remained small has helped. A very large organisation could have meant a dilution of some basic principles that have held it together (like decentralised decision making etc). It may have led to some bureaucratic functioning.”

In a similar vein, Pankaj Sekhsaria, associated with KV since 1995, points to “the founding principles of a flat structure, of nimble footedness, of a frugal institutional structure, frugal finances, the capacity to attract and support the new generation,” and “the class structure, perhaps unintentionally, has also helped – the fact that most, if not all of us, come from a certain class, have had a certain kind of education, speak English etc... has also helped.”

He lists two key challenges for KV: “to keep alive the key broad principles that KV was founded on and continues to believe in,” and “to find the people to be part of KV because an institution is nothing if it is not its constituent members and

membership, particularly in a context like KVs. This is critical because it is this set of people who will decide the responses of KV to institutional and societal changes. These individuals are the pathways that connect the past to the future because this is the present where the action happens. The present situation is very heartening, because of the new generation that considers itself KV members. And again I feel Ashish has had a huge role to play in it – in allowing for the space and creating the space that allows for this new generation to come in. He made it happen for people like me, my generation and one can see it happening again about 15 years after I first joined KV.”

Considering the place of KV, Kanchi Kohli, who joined KV in 2000, observes “KV place has always been distinct and unique in the world we live in. It gives home to several ideas, interests and dilemmas. Some of these continue to blend into what KV is looking like at that given point in time, and many move on finding, creating and shaping new histories. That is why till there are KV members, there will be a KV: connected and disjointed at the same time.”

When asked about the future course of the institution, Meenal Tatpati, who has been a KV member since 2013, reflects, “I cannot predict the direction we are going in. However, I would want KV to be in the negotiating space it has always been in - walking the middle path, especially given the immense polarisation affecting our community and civil society.”

In this process of documenting KV’s history and going through the archives, I marvel at the uncanny relevance and durability

of many of the old debates (both internal and societal). Several of its institutional practices, like its constant agonising over the ethics of funding, or its sustained attempts at transparent and democratic decision-making, make it stand out as a rare entity amongst environmental NGOs. Tracing the trajectory also helps us see its transformation beyond a narrowly defined environment action group or a bird-watching club to include socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of transformation. Kalpavriksh of the present can perhaps be thought of as a bricolage — an assemblage of diverse (and sometimes contrasting!) ideologies and approaches, with traces from different moments and movements, that somehow endures.

