

Xavier Centre for
New Humanities and Compassion Studies
Xavier University Bhubaneswar

People's Manifesto
for a
Just, Equitable, and
Sustainable India

Vikalp Sangam Process





Remembering M. K. Gandhi

Commemorating his 150th Birth Anniversary

2 October 1869 – 2 October 2019

“In a gentle way, you can shake the world.”





Studies on Public Compassion
No. 2, 2019

Reprint Series

People's Manifesto
for a
Just, Equitable, and
Sustainable India

Xavier Centre for New Humanities and Compassion Studies
Xavier University Bhubaneswar (XUB)
Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

Studies on Public Compassion: Exploring Theory and Praxis

Reprint Series

Humanity is going through a challenging time, socially, culturally, ecologically and spiritually. No doubt we have grown and advanced a great deal and have achieved many great feats. But our focus on just material growth has also become a monstrous challenge, for it deeply harms our humanity. Even as we celebrate the glittering temples of affluence and consumption, modernity has also scattered the globe with empires of inequality, cruelty and slavery and sites of suspicion, prejudice, conflicts, wars, pain and death. All these scar us deeply – physically, socio-culturally, psychologically, and spiritually – nudging us to take serious note and act. Our individual and collective futures are dangerously at stake. And, there is a battle within, as well as without, to reclaim the compassionate human spirit.

Specifically, the many contexts of human cruelty and suffering we are in today put an urgent demand on us in the academia to reclaim the ‘human’ in humanities (and the ‘social’ in social sciences). In this effort to reclaim the ‘human’, the role of institutions of higher learning, like Xavier University Bhubaneswar (XUB), is very important. They offer dynamic, dialogic and nurturing spaces to influence and to shape the human spirit, directly or indirectly shaping generations of young people and their delicate futures to public causes and wellbeing. What we need today are research studies and learning opportunities to understand the human condition in all its aspects. We need to generate or disseminate knowledge produced by like-minded organisations or institutions that help us to better understand ourselves, our societies, our ecologies and the impact of our decisions. We need solutions as well as proposals of solutions for deep transformation. And through this, we can build a world where challenges to our common humanity can be overcome and where public compassion can be nurtured for universal Common Good.

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People's Manifesto for a Just, Equitable, and Sustainable India

The Constituents of the Vikalp Sangam* Process February 2019

The Vikalp Sangam Process is a platform to bring together movements, groups and individuals working on just, equitable and sustainable pathways to human and ecological well-being. It rejects the current model of development and the structures of inequality and injustice underlying it, and searches for alternatives in practice and vision. Over 50 movements and organisations around the country are involved. For more information, please see <http://www.vikalpsangam.org/about/>

* The organisations in the Vikalp Sangam is listed at the end of this document.

About this People's Manifesto

To deal with the multiple crises that India faces is in essence also a renewed commitment to the values of the Constitution of India and to a meaningful democratic, dignified and compassionate society. This should become the central objective of all public planning. It requires urgent short-term and long-term steps in every sector or area of society.

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**People's Manifesto for a
Just, Equitable, and Sustainable India**

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The Commitments We Make and Seek

We commit, and ask all political parties, people's movements, civil society organisations, and other relevant groups and collectives to commit to an India that is just, equitable, and sustainable for today's and coming generations, where:

- *the well-being and health of all is ensured by providing opportunities to engage in materially, culturally, ethically and spiritually fulfilling lives and livelihoods;*
- *everyone has meaningful avenues of directly participating in decision-making through direct forms of democracy;*
- *there is no discrimination based on gender, caste, class, ethnicity, religion, 'race', ability, sexual orientation, and other such features;*
- *the diversity and pluralism of cultures and knowledges and faiths are respected and enabled to co-exist harmoniously; and*
- *there is respect for the rest of nature and the ecological conditions on which all life depends.*

The above commitment (and related steps, which we spell out below) is urgently required in the context of the multiple crises we face today. There is growing tide of social conflicts and tension, intolerance, inequality, ill-health, erosion of cultural (including language) diversity, loss of traditional knowledge and skills, and massive ecological devastation. This is caused currently by dominant models of economic development and encouraged by authoritarian, religiously divisive tendencies in the state, all of these building on traditional inequalities and discrimination of various kinds including gender and caste and beginning to reverse the gains attained by these sections in the last few decades of democratic processes.

To deal with these multiple crises that India faces, such a commitment, which is in essence also a renewed commitment to the values of the Constitution of India and to a meaningful democratic and dignified society, should become the central objective of all public planning. It requires urgent short-term and long-term steps in every sector or area of society.

Broadly, we are seeking the following actions at policy and programmatic level, summarised in Part 1, and detailed out in Part 2, with a special section relating to Youth in Part 3.





Part 1: Summary of Actions

1. Steps to re-establish India's global role as a champion of human rights, peace and demilitarisation, and ecological wisdom, including through the revitalisation of the United Nations and support to people's democratic access to global decision-making, and advocacy to make trade and other economic agreements subservient to human rights and environment ones.

Talisman for every public action: does it enhance global peace and justice?

2. Highest priority in all plans, budgets, policies and programmes to the most vulnerable sections of society, including those discriminated against on the basis of caste, gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, faith/religion, 'race', ability/disability, literacy, location, and other such features.

Talisman for every public action: does it benefit the vulnerable, does it reduce discrimination?

3. Strong measures to tackle the gross economic inequalities facing Indian society, including caps on salary levels, high taxation on income, wealth and inheritance, basic minimum income and employment guarantee for the vulnerable, and pension for all workers in the primary sector.

Talisman for every public action: does it reduce inequality, does it empower those who are currently deprived?

4. Widespread programmes for re-establishing harmony amongst people of different faiths, ethnicities, languages, and so on, starting from school level upwards, and prompt action against those spreading misinformation, hatred, and enmity amongst various communities.

Talisman for every public action: does it increase harmony, does it reduce social conflict and tension?

5. Further democratisation of decision-making, empowering gram sabhas and urban area or mohalla sabhas with financial and legal powers apart from those already provided for in the Constitution and relevant laws, ensuring processes of prior informed consent of such bodies for activities in their territories, and initiating decision-making forums at landscape levels such as river basins and sub-basins.

Talisman for every public action: does it increase meaningful participation of people, especially of the currently marginalised?

6. A comprehensive policy and law on accountability and transparency of all institutions of the state, and of political parties; and repeal of laws/provisions that enable the state to stifle democratic dissent or provide draconian powers to police and armed forces.

Talisman for every public action: is it fully transparent to the public, does it enhance accountability?

7. A massive programme on livelihoods that combine traditional and modern skills and knowledge, with highest priority in all plans and budgets to the two biggest livelihood sectors of agriculture (including farming, pastoralism, fisheries, and forestry) and crafts/small manufacturing; this should include reserving all products and services that can be



made or generated through small-scale and medium-scale for community-based, decentralised production, through measures such as the facilitation of democratically run producer collectives (cooperatives, companies, unions, etc).

Talisman for every public action: does it enhance and secure livelihoods of the vulnerable and marginalised, does it accord respect to all sources of livelihood that are dignified?

8. A national land/water use plan and policy, with steps for conservation of the most important ecosystems and ecological functions on which all our lives depend, and of the wildlife and biodiversity they contain; and initiate a country-wide programme of land/soil and water regeneration oriented at creating sustainable natural resource assets for local economies; all this through legal measures that empower and recognise rights of local communities akin to what is provided for in the Forest Rights Act, and Constitutional recognition of the rights of nature.

Talisman for every public action: does it protect natural ecosystems and ecological functions?

9. A comprehensive policy and legal regime to ensure that economic planning respects ecological limits at all levels, local to national, including through independently conducted, participatory, comprehensive environmental impact assessments of projects, programmes, schemes and sectors; and that all chemicals and substances harmful to human or ecosystem/animal health are replaced by ecologically sensitive substances.

Talisman for every public action: does it sustain the natural environment and retain ecological health vital for people and wildlife?

10. Programmes to bring back into prioritised public support all basic needs, including health, sanitation, housing, learning and education, water, food and energy, providing significantly higher budgetary allocations for these than currently given; actions to convert all food production into agroecological and safe processes with maximum support to small farmers, pastoralists and fishers and their full rights over land, seeds, and water; actions to produce most energy through decentralised renewable sources by 2030 while also undertaking measures to contain demand to what is essential and within ecological limits; and urgent actions to regenerate and conserve water sources which give priority to water use for essential life functions.

Talisman for every public action: does it enhance, secure, and make accessible/affordable basic needs of everyone, and in particular of those currently deprived of these, in ways that are ecologically sustainable?

11. Steps to make urban and rural settlements dignified, livable, and sustainable, as self-reliant for basic needs as possible, and with full rights of access to land, housing, and other amenities for the vulnerable sections of society, and highest priority to public and non-motorable means of mobility/transportation.

Talisman for every public action: is it leading to more livable and sustainable conditions of living for everyone, especially those currently deprived?

12. Initiatives to transform all learning and education towards methods that are activity-based, enjoyable, culturally and ecologically rooted, enabling learners to imbibe the ethics of justice and responsibility, driven by self-learning processes, and able to instil respect for cultural diversity and ecological



sustainability, including through relevant amendments of Right to Education Act, and community-based processes for both children and adults; dedicate at least 4% of national and state budgets to this sector.

Talisman for every public action: is it leading to all-round learning opportunities for everyone, especially those currently deprived?

13. A comprehensive policy and programmes on innovation, technology and knowledge, that encourages and supports public and informal processes of innovation, recognises the creativity of 'ordinary' people, maximises the availability of knowledge and information in the public and commons domain including through independent media, and puts all technological developments up for public review to gauge how responsible they are to the goals of justice, accessibility, and sustainability.

Talisman for every public action: does it further democratise and make publicly accessible knowledge and technology?

14. A comprehensive policy and relevant programmes to make conditions for healthy living and health services accessible to all, especially to vulnerable sections, including through the integrated use of multiple health systems, linkages with other determinants of health (food, social and physical environment, education, etc), community governance and monitoring; dedicate at least 10% of national and state budgets to this sector to ensure that the public sector reaches all.

Talisman for every public action: is it enabling conditions of health for all, especially for those currently deprived of healthy conditions and health services?

15. Initiatives to encourage the democratic flourishing of the arts (visual and performing), removing the caste, class and gender discriminations that are embedded in some of them, making them accessible to all, and converting public institutions promoting them into independent bodies.

Talisman for every public action: does it support the arts to flourish in ways accessible to all?

16. In all the above, give special attention to the empowerment and facilitation of India's youth and women, and the enabling of their own voices in determining the present and the future. (Please see Part 3 on Youth).

Talisman for every public action: does it empower the youth towards greater justice and self-determination?



Part 2: Detailed Sectoral Actions

Society, Culture, and Peace

- Strengthen or initiate measures to remove inequalities, inequities, and discriminations of various kinds, including those related to caste, gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, faith/ religion, 'race', ability/ disability, literacy, location, and other such features, including special programmes creating dignified living for all; this includes stronger implementation of a number of Constitutional provisions and laws in India that mandate such measures, but also prevention of their misuse by sections of society that are already privileged in many ways;
- Encourage initiatives aimed at sustaining and promoting harmony and mutual respect among communities of different ethnicities, faiths, cultures, languages, beliefs and ideologies (for instance by encouraging collective inter-community celebrations in various festivals), and take immediate action against those who incite or promote hate, intolerance, misinformation;
- Instil awareness and respect for diversity and pluralism from childhood, including by encouraging inter-community celebrations and events in schools and other learning institutions;
- Take urgent steps to sustain or (where necessary) revive languages and dialects that are being lost, by facilitating inter-generational and other forms of learning in their

speakers, mandating mother-tongue learning in schools or other learning institutions, using such languages in official and civil society programmes, creating vocabulary aid like dictionaries of such languages and dialects (where appropriate), and adding Constitutional and policy provisions for such measures;

- Take urgent steps to similarly facilitate the continuation or revival of forms of art (visual, performing, etc) that are being lost, including by converting relevant government-initiated institutions into independent bodies, publicly-funded;
- Promote forums of inter-community understanding and dialogue, especially in areas prone to tension and conflict;
- Revive the inculcation of basic values like justice, non-violence, simplicity, respect, inter-dependence, generosity, responsibility, collectivity, in institutions of learning, not in the conventional top-down moralistic manner but through activities that combine joy and learning, including some suggested above.

Democracy

In the context of some fundamental flaws in the provisions related to rural and urban self-governance provided for in the Constitution, as also weak implementation of these provisions, and in the context of the erosion of democratic freedoms by governments that have attempted to stifle the right of dissent, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and so on:

- Assert in all public forums and in actions, the fundamental democratic freedoms and rights enshrined in the Constitution;



- Provide for financial and legal decentralisation to bodies of self-governance, apart from the rights they already have under the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments and related laws;
- Provide for full powers of self-governance to gram sabhas (i.e. the full village assembly, not only panchayats), and to area or mohalla sabhas (urban neighbourhoods), not only the ward sabhas or other existing institutions that are too big to enable direct participation of all members;
- Facilitate processes of building capacity amongst all citizens, to meaningfully participate in the above forums of self-governance, and create mechanisms for consensus-based decision-making to the extent possible;
- Provide special facilitation to those currently marginalised from forums of decision-making, including women;
- Initiate governance, planning and management institutions for larger landscapes ('biocultural regions') that have ecological, geographical and cultural contiguity (such as river basins and sub-basins, sub-watersheds, settlements around a contiguous forest, etc), which may or may not coincide with current district, subdistrict, and state boundaries; begin a process of re-imagining current political boundaries to make them more compatible with ecological and cultural contiguities and connections;
- Encourage and facilitate political mobilisation of collectives or communities that are non-party in nature, including people's movements, cooperatives, etc;
- Initiate or strengthen measures to enhance transparency of all political bodies, including full disclosure of accounts;

- Initiate or strengthen measures for full accountability of organs of the state, especially for their role in safeguarding the rights of and justice for marginalised sections, regulating public and private sector, and providing welfare to those who cannot self-provision; initiate regular, credible and open communication and information about outcomes, targets, processes and achievements in different public sectors and programmes that are verifiable;
- Stop and reverse the trend of privatising essential public services (transport, health, education, and so on) in the name of innovative financing and PPP models, which are reducing access of the poor to these services and giving and excuse to the state to reduce budget allocations for social sectors;
- Bring in policy frameworks for the various priorities given in this document, where not already in place, through fully participatory and consultative processes;
- Repeal laws and provisions that are anti-democratic, including those used to give draconian powers to police or armed forces, to stifle democratic dissent, and to label dissenting citizens as terrorists or seditionists or other such terms;
- Promote internal democracy and transparency within all organisations and institutions, including civil society groups.

Livelihoods and Employment

In the context of the enormous crisis of unemployment, underemployment, misemployment, and de-skilling that India faces, and conversely the search for meaningful, dignified and adequate livelihoods and employment:



- Give highest priority in government and civil society support, to the continuation and enhancement of fulfilling traditional livelihoods and occupations that communities or individuals choose to continue, including in agriculture, pastoralism (nomadic or sedentary), forestry, fisheries, crafts, cottage industry, traditional medicine and other such sectors (recognising that the majority of Indians still depend on them); provide special incentives for current and new generations to remain in or take up such livelihoods, including through economic value chains, empowerment of women in male-dominated sectors, recognising community rights over the relevant resources including land (using the model of Community Forest Resources under the Forest Rights Act), and institutions for encouraging or developing innovation;
- Reserve all products and services that can be made or generated through small-scale and medium-scale for community-based, decentralised production (including traditional and new crafts), through measures such as the facilitation of producer collectives (cooperatives, companies, unions, etc) run democratically by their members, phasing out the control of big corporations in these products and services, and facilitating production processes in villages and urban neighbourhoods where such producers are located;
- Initiate measures for removing the inequity in pay and remuneration between men and women for the same kind of work;
- Initiate measures for capping maximum salaries and pay to a level that is not more than twice the average income, and reducing to the minimum possible, the inequity in pay between physical and mental labour, between occupations of various kinds, and between various levels of employment in an institution;

- Promote livelihoods and employment that are ecologically sensitive and sustainable, building on the vision of 'green jobs' that has been promoted by the United Nations.

Economy and Technology

In the context of the increasing stranglehold of private corporations and the state over India's economy and over technological development, the consequent alienation and disempowerment of hundreds of millions of producers and consumers, and the need to re-establish public, democratic control (arthik swaraj) over the economy and technology:

- Encourage the re-localisation of production and exchange, in all sectors where it is possible and feasible, and especially in the provisioning of basic needs, with the long-term aim of creating self-reliant, relatively self-sufficient communities where such needs can be generated within a radius of a few dozen kilometres (see below regarding the decentralisation of food, energy, water, and other such sectors);
- Strongly regulate the private corporate sector to eliminate labour and environmental exploitation, and monopolies of various kinds, and eventually replace all such production by producer collectives;
- Facilitate consumer collectives and unions that can assist in moving the economy towards democratic control and sensitivity towards human and ecological health;
- Encourage the creation and spread of decentralised, local exchange systems including community currencies, non-monetised systems, the gift economy, and time-sharing based on principles of equal value for all work;



- Put in place principles of operation for larger-scale trade and economic exchange, including that this should not be at the expense of local self-reliance or self-sufficiency for basic needs;
- Move all production of goods and services towards processes that are ecologically sensitive and sustainable;
- Encourage technological and economic innovation amongst producers and communities, recognising that innovation has been taking place for millennia and is not a monopoly of formal, modern institutions; re-orient existing schemes, missions and institutions of innovation, design, and skills to respect and promote democratic, decentralised, non-formal systems;
- Encourage innovation that moves production, transportation and other relevant processes towards ecological sustainability and socio-cultural sensitivity;
- Replace GDP as the measure of economic well-being with multi-dimensional, qualitative-quantitative measures that include material, socio-cultural, ecological well-being aspects, building on and modifying to suit diverse Indian conditions, available systems such as Gross National Happiness, National Well-being Accounts, and Genuine Progress Indicator (and not falling into the trap of using a single indicator);
- Discourage and disincentivise wasteful consumption and cultures of consumerism, through widespread awareness of the impacts of such behaviour, regulation of industry and advertising that encourages it, and measures to limit the accumulation of wealth (see below);

- Take strong and urgent measures to address the gross economic inequalities afflicting India, by putting caps on salaries/incomes, heavier taxation on higher levels of incomes, wealth, and inheritance, increasing the basic incomes of all those currently below or just above the 'poverty line', pension schemes for primary sector producers and service providers, and other such measures; initiate a national discussion on the need to regulate or eliminate private property and wealth, and their inheritance;
- Ensure that all planning, budgeting, and other macro-economic measures are in consonance with ecological limits and the goals of socio-economic justice and equity.

Food, Water and Energy

In the context of the severe crisis of hunger, malnutrition, and unsafe food, lack of access to clean and safe water, and inadequate access to reliable sources of energy; and in the context of the increasingly unsafe and ecologically hazardous ways in which food, water, and energy production or provisioning takes place:

Food

- Incentivise and encourage the use of agricultural lands for food production, through means that are agroecological (including organic/natural), low-input, small farmer based, biologically diverse, and where the farmer has sovereignty over the means of production (*anna swaraj*) including seeds, land, and knowledge; amend the Food Security Act to become the Food Sovereignty Act to enable such transformation, and transfer all chemical fertiliser subsidies to agroecological production till farmers can



be self-sufficient; set an aim for India to become 100% organic in food production by 2030 (with interim targets of 30% by 2022 and 60% by 2027);

- Facilitate access to reasonably priced organic and healthy food to economically marginalised communities, including working populations in cities who are otherwise condemned to eating junk food, through removing subsidies for unsafe food and where necessary providing temporary subsidies to safe/healthy food;
- Create awareness about the importance and value of the diversity of cuisines and diets in India, promoting 'slow food' over the junk food especially for the youth;
- Encourage continuation or renewal of the use of uncultivated foods in diet, taking care to ensure that their use is sustainable;
- Facilitate equitable links between food producers and consumers, encouraging local trade to meet food needs as far as possible, and enabling them to negotiate prices that are acceptable to both;
- Provide minimum support price to agricultural products where market conditions are not conducive to a fair price being obtained by the farmer;

Water

- Establish and follow a prioritisation of water use, in the following order: water for life (drinking, washing, sanitation, livestock, wildlife), ecosystem needs, livelihoods (including food production), for adaptation to changes (climate, land use, livelihoods, etc), and industrial/infrastructural use;

- Prioritise decentralised harvesting, governance, and use of water over mega-projects and centralised governance, with appropriate combinations of traditional and modern knowledge;
- Provide widespread support for regeneration, restoration, and de-polluting of wetlands and water sources (including decommissioning mega-projects where feasible), and the regeneration and conservation of their catchments;
- Ensure equitable distribution of water through community-based governance mechanisms, and measures for regulating water (including groundwater) use through such mechanisms;
- Treat all water and waterbodies as public commons, not available for privatisation; add a Constitutional provision and legal measures to this effect.

Energy

- Put in place strong demand management, curbing wasteful consumption of energy, and projecting and keeping to the maximum energy that can be produced within given ecological limits; promoting energy conservation and saving, and use of efficient materials and equipment over wasteful ones;
- Prioritise decentralised, renewable, participatorily governed energy sources, production, and grids over conventional sources and production; phase out fossil fuel and nuclear fuel based energy production and replace completely by renewables by 2030;
- Initiate measures to ensure equitable access to energy;



- Promote non-electrical energy options including biomass, and traditional technologies like watermills upgraded as necessary, and passive heating and cooling;
- Optimise production and distribution, equitably distributing cost of such production and distribution, improving efficiency, making public institutions accountable, incorporating end-user orientations into planning.

Health and Hygiene

In the context of widespread health crises, caused by inadequate access to preventive and curative health services especially with the increasing privatisation of the health sector, poor access to nutritional and adequate food and to clean water, increasing exposure to chemical pollutants and conflictual social environments, rapid decline in availability of free or cheap nutritional foods and medicinal resources from nature, irresponsible promotion of junk food and drinks, continuation of 'diseases of poverty' added to by 'diseases of affluence', and a lukewarm promotion of multiple health systems especially AYUSH and folk practices:

- Give high priority to preventing ill-health in the first place, by improving social determinants of health such as nutritional food, water, sanitation, a clean environment, safe transport, and a healthy social environment; promoting traditional popular understandings along with demystification of modern understandings about one's body and health to empower people for undertaking health promotion and preventive action. Ensure access to curative/symptomatic facilities to those

who have conventionally not had such access, including through efficient public health services, and accountability of the state's responsibility towards citizens;

- Avoid an over interventionist framework, accepting limits to medical interventions;
- Facilitate the pluralism and integration of various health systems, traditional and modern, bringing back into popular use the diverse systems from India and outside including indigenous/folk medicine, nature cure, Ayurvedic, Unani and other holistic or integrative approaches; ensure that each health clinic, hospital and other such facility has multiple systems available;
- Enable and empower community-based management and control of healthcare and hygiene, with individual and collective responsibility towards maintaining healthy surrounds, and elimination of caste-based management of human and other wastes;
- Ensure at least 10% of the national and state budgets are dedicated to the above activities.

Environment and Ecology

In the context of the massive, widespread and irreversible damage to natural ecosystems, biodiversity, and the environment caused by the flawed models of development and governance, and certain demographic trends:

- Facilitate independent studies to establish (using the best available traditional and modern knowledge) the ecological limits and carrying capacity of the country as a whole, and of regions within it, and publicise the results widely;



- Ensure that economic planning respects these limits at all levels, local to national, including through independently conducted, participatory, comprehensive environmental impact assessments of projects (including infrastructure), programmes, schemes and sectors;
- According highest priority to maintaining the integrity and sustenance of natural ecosystems, biodiversity and wildlife populations, with special attention to those already threatened; re-orient all conservation measures to being community-based (using models such as those being established under the Forest Rights Act) and using the best available traditional and modern knowledge;
- Ensure that forests, wetlands, grasslands, coasts, marine areas, and other such ecosystems on which communities depend, remain (or are brought back into) the commons, governed by democratic community institutions such as gram sabhas, with core involvement of women's collectives in such governance;
- Assess India's contribution to global ecological problems including biodiversity loss, the climate crisis, toxics and pollution, and take measures towards being a responsible global citizen;
- Assess the ongoing or potential impacts of these global ecological problems on India's biodiversity and people, and initiate urgent measures for ameliorating these impacts, especially where they are affecting or likely to affect already marginalised populations;
- Specifically, facilitate a review and revision of India's climate action plan (and of state climate action plans), with widespread participation of communities on the ground likely to be most affected, civil society organisations,

and other independent experts, with a view to making it more robust and impactful through substantial upward revision of goals for mitigation and adaptation, specific target for emission peaking, and prioritised actions to help climate refugees;

- Initiate a nation-wide programme for land and water regeneration, making this a basis for meaningful employment and livelihoods;
- Phase out, over the next 10 years, all toxic products such as pesticides and detergents and a host of other dangerous chemicals or metals, replacing them with ecologically sensitive and safe (for human and animal health) alternatives;
- Put high priority to cleaning up all waterbodies, eliminating pollution in urban and industrial areas, and bringing down noise to acceptable levels;
- Consider according rights to nature including wildlife, in the Constitution and in law;
- Encourage and incentivise zero waste settlements, with high priority to preventing the creation of waste in the first place (using traditional or new alternatives that are ecologically safe), prohibition on products that create toxic waste, and where materials are still discarded after full use, convert them into useful products by repurposing, upcycling, recycling, or composting;
- Set up a National Environment Commission, with independent Constitutional status akin to the Election Commission and the CAG, to lay down standards, monitor compliance by state and other agencies, and provide a redressal forum for citizens.



- Ensure that at least 5% of the national and state budgets are dedicated to the above activities.

Settlements

In the context of the horrendous living and working conditions in cities, the ecological unsustainability of urbanisation, the inadequacy of amenities and facilities in villages, and the peculiar 'falling between the stools' condition of semi-rural semi-urban settlements, that are prevalent in India, and the need to move towards more just, accessible, equitable, and sustainable settlements:

- Make ecological and social impact assessments, and area/ward/neighbourhood participation, mandatory for all urban planning and budgeting processes, with appropriate laws and schemes under the 74th Constitutional Amendment (see 'Democracy' above);
- Facilitate much greater work-home-leisure integration in urban planning, minimising the need for transportation for essential activities;
- Encourage and incentivise sustainable construction, architecture and housing that is dignified and accessible for all, maximises local materials use, puts a check on size, respects natural landforms and landscapes around it, and prioritises economically and socially marginalised sections of society;
- Initiate measures to maximise local generation of energy, water harvesting and responsible use, and other basic needs of urban residents, minimising the negative footprint of cities on rural areas;

- Build into urban planning, biodiversity conservation through conservation of wildlife habitats including migration corridors;
- Facilitate the provision of full basic needs and amenities to all rural and semi-rural/semi-urban areas, as appropriate to their ecological and cultural conditions, building on available local skills, knowledge, and resources, and respecting decision-making by local bodies of self-governance including on all the local commons (see 'Democracy' above);
- Defend all common spaces, and reclaim them where taken over for private purposes, that are important in each neighbourhood and for the settlement as a whole, including green areas, wetlands, parks, and the like;
- Make all settlements friendly, pleasant and safe for walking and cycling.

Transportation

In the context of the inadequacy and ecological unsustainability of transportation systems prevalent in India today:

- Give highest priority to sustainable, accessible and equitable means of transportation in both urban and rural areas, with highest priority to mass public and non-motorized (cycling, walking) means;
- Disincentivise private motorised vehicles, especially the automobile, with heavy taxation, areas/timing that are off-limit to them, and minimal road space;
- Institute a cap on the speed of road traffic for safety and to optimise energy use.



Learning, Education, Knowledge

In the context of the following multiple crises in learning and education: inadequate and/or inappropriate systems and facilities, especially in relation to marginalised or special need sections of society such as Dalits, pastoralists, Adivasis, 'disabled' and women; schools and colleges over much of India being places not so much of genuine learning and developing all-rounded human beings as of superficial cramming of information in enormously stifling environments and oriented to just fitting into dominant economic systems; uniform top-down policies that disrespect the diversity of local situations (including of mother tongues) and of innovations in learning; the inculcation of individualistic, selfish, hostilely competitive values amongst learners; the suppression and erosion of traditional and local knowledges by modern, formal ones; and the inadequate implementation of progressive policy directions in successive national guidelines that mandate more locally relevant, activity-based approaches:

- Promote initiatives to create spaces and opportunities for learning and education that enable continued or renewed connection with the environment and nature, with communities, with one's inner voice, and with humanity as a whole;
- Create learning environments that nurture a fuller range of collective and individual potentials and relationships, treating each learner as having the potential for creativity and innovation, encouraging critical and holistic thinking and action;
- Encourage synergies between the formal systems and informal community based learning, the traditional and the modern, the local and the global, and the combination of theory and practical (e.g. head-heart-hands of the *Nai Taleem* approach);

- Create mechanisms of accountability of public institutions including the state towards facilitating such learning and education, and prioritising these over private institutions;
- Create greater learning spaces for adults, with a diversity of approaches that go beyond the uniform ‘adult education’ approach;
- Facilitate the use of different communication and teaching modes, including arts, crafts, theatre, dance, and others;
- Re-orient teacher training institutions and processes towards all of the above;
- Dedicate at least 4% of the national and state budgets to learning and education;
- Amend the Right to Education Act to enable a greater diversity of innovating learning environments to flourish, while ensuring minimum quality standards;
- Support initiatives using knowledge as an empowering tool, especially for marginalised sections;
- Encourage equitable cross-fertilisation and collaboration between modern and traditional, scientific and non-scientific, formal and informal, and urban and rural spheres of knowledge;
- Promote initiatives making knowledge as part of the ‘commons’ rather than a privately owned or controlled commodity, including support to open source, creative commons, and other such systems;
- Promote respect for various forms of transmitting knowledge, including traditional forms such as oral traditions, story telling in non-exploitative ways.



Media

In the context of the increasing stranglehold of the media (print, digital, 'social') by private corporations or the state, the spread of 'false' and fake news, the trolling or suppression of voices of dissent, and the struggles that independent media face:

- Provide public support to independent media in various forms, including by making state-sponsored platforms on TV, radio, etc truly independent;
- Facilitate and recognise alternative media initiatives, innovative use of media to communicate enabling and empowering information, and processes that make media part of our life/work rather than an 'external' tool to use;
- Initiate processes that make information access free, or easier in places usually neglected, considered 'remote' or disconnected;
- Regulate advertising to ensure it is not misleading, offensive, and invasive, especially that which is aimed at children; empower citizens to take legal and other action against such advertising;
- Take strong action against deliberately false, misleading, and distorted messaging, 'news' and analysis that are aimed at creating disharmony and conflict, taking care not to misuse such actions against the freedom of speech.

Law, Justice, Custom

In the context of a highly centralised system of framing and implementing laws, a justice system that hardly works for marginalised sections of society and is groaning under the weight

of unresolved and unheard cases, the weakening of customary ways of fairly handling disputes (not those which are repressive or discriminatory), and a predominantly punitive way of dealing with violations of laws and customs which does not really address the underlying reasons for such behaviour:

- Enable widespread public participation in the framing, governance, and implementation of laws, including through empowering institutions of local self-governance to be mandatorily part of such processes;
- Ensure that all laws have a core component of public participation in its implementation, and enabling measures for action against those in authority to violate their provisions or deliberately block implementation;
- Enhance access to institutions of justice and redressal for those 'distanced' from them for reasons of social or economic marginalisation; enhance and make effective public support for people who cannot afford their own legal redressal;
- Facilitate a healthy relationship between formal, statutory law and social norms and customs, each enabling or checking the other in the interest of justice, equity, fairness, and sustainability; increase attempts to broadbase norms as ways of life (starting from childhood), rather than only as formal rules/laws that need to be imposed from above;
- Reform the punitive regime to take a broader view of what is a 'crime' or 'illegal', with harm to others being the fundamental criterion rather than 'difference' based on personal orientation or other features, and prioritise



measures of redressal, rehabilitation, and behavioural change over punishment;

- Enable much greater community involvement, including decentralised courts, ombudspersons, and other such innovations, in dealing with cases, while always ensuring justice, equity, and fairness.

Global Relations

In the context of what appears to be a distinct decline in the non-aligned, pro-oppressed and pro-freedom roles that India has traditionally taken in its global relations, and yet acknowledging that it still does often assert the ideals of a just, fair world where human rights and ecological sustainability are upheld:

- Encourage and facilitate state, civil society, citizen or multi-lateral initiatives that offer alternatives to the prevalent state of belligerent and hyper-competitive international relations fuelled by geopolitical rivalries;
- Pro-actively push for enhancing the human rights, ecological, socio-cultural and other values in international and global relations, including stronger implementation of the many United Nations agreements on these issues;
- Champion an approach to collective human well-being, rather than narrow national priorities and notions such as national superiority, as the mandate of diplomacy;
- Assert the historical liability of northern/industrialised nations, including those who have been colonial powers, for the devastation wrought on the world, and seek appropriate redressal including the financing of restorative, compensatory measures;

- Seek global moratoriums on increases in military, surveillance and police spending, and progressive reduction in spending on these, a global ban on arms trading, and eventually eliminating weapons of all types by all states;
- Engage in widespread global dialogue re-examining notions of 'nation-state' and emphasising relations amongst 'peoples' of the world including through restructuring the United Nations to provide central say to non-state collectives and communities;
- Enhance and sharpen global agreements on the environment, in particular pushing for urgent action on the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and toxics, including adding teeth to their implementation;
- Push for regulating global trade, including relevant institutions like WTO, to be in compliance with global and national norms and agreements on labour, environment/ecology, and human rights; ensure that such trade is never allowed to undermine local economies and cultures, or to cause irreversible ecological damage.



Part 3: A Special Perspective on Deepening Youth Participation

- Promote, support and co-create 'empowering spaces' for young people that nourish their learning and leadership through self to society journeys. These include non-judgmental spaces that are co-led by young people across different and multiple identities and work on and inspire the principles of social justice, refl-action, organic renewal, love, learning, freedom, ownership and social hope.
- Promote and nurture youth led, youth-centric organisations and youth empowerment centers at various local levels, and their collectivization to enhance empowerment and protection of rights, and to co-create, put into action, and articulate in various media, a forward-looking youth vision for India.
- Ensure widespread youth participation particularly from vulnerable communities in formulating, implementing and monitoring all laws, policies, plans and schemes.
- Significantly increase participation of youth led and youth centric organisations in government schemes like NSS and NYKS to enhance life skills and core capacities of young people along with ongoing volunteering processes.
- Recognize employment as a fundamental right and providing opportunities and building capacities for meaningful employment; especially promoting alternative livelihood options linked to ecological

regeneration and conservation, social justice, basic need services and products, taking cognizance of the skills that young people already have particularly in the primary sector; providing easy access to funding for “micro-entrepreneurship” and “solo-preneurship” among youth for the same.

- Provide special support and services for vulnerable youth, particularly differently abled, those with mental health challenges and those from vulnerable communities especially young women.
- Ensure democratic participation and inclusion of students in decisions making across educational institutions and campuses.
- Create separate ministries for youth development / empowerment and sports and deepening ‘the youth development and youth empowerment’ perspective and setting up of youth empowerment centers that offer counseling, sports, recreation facilities and career guidance facilities that are focused as much on alternative livelihoods.
- Honor the promises made in the National Youth Policy and State youth policies including setting up of the youth advisory councils and youth commissions at various levels to report and monitor progress on the commitments made. Formulating state youth policies where there are none.
- Promote national, South Asian and global exchange programs that allow young people to expand their horizons and visions and build solidarities across common concerns including those that are reflected in this manifesto across different issues.



Endorsing Members of Vikalp Sangam Core Group

Organisations/ Movements/ Networks

- ACCORD (Tamil Nadu)
- Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (National)
- Alternative Law Forum (Bengaluru)
- Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (Bengaluru)
- BHASHA (Gujarat)
- Bhoomi College (Bengaluru)
- Blue Ribbon Movement (Mumbai)
- Centre for Education and Documentation (Mumbai)
- Centre for Equity Studies (Delhi)
- CGNetSwara (Chhattisgarh)
- Chalakudypuzha Samrakshana Samithi / River Research Centre (Kerala)
- ComMutiny: The Youth Collective (Delhi)
- Deccan Development Society (Telangana)
- Deer Park (Himachal Pradesh)
- Development Alternatives (Delhi)
- Dharamitra (Maharashtra)
- Ekta Parishad (several states)
- Ektha (Chennai)
- EQUATIONS (Bengaluru)
- Gene Campaign (Delhi)
- Greenpeace India (Bengaluru)
- Health Swaraaj Samvaad (National)
- Ideosync (Delhi)

- Jagori Rural (Himachal Pradesh)
- Kalpavriksh (Maharashtra)
- Knowledge in Civil Society (National)
- Kriti Team (Delhi)
- Local Futures (Ladakh)
- Maati (Uttarakhand)
- National Alliance of Peoples' Movements (national)
- North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (Meghalaya)
- Peoples' Science Institute (Uttarakhand)
- reStore (Chennai)
- Sahjeevan (Kachchh)
- Sambhaavnaa (Himachal Pradesh)
- Samvedana (Maharashtra)
- Sangama (Bengaluru)
- Shikshantar (Rajasthan)
- Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (Ladakh)
- SOPPECOM (Maharashtra)
- South Asian Dialogue on Ecological Democracy (Delhi)
- Students' Environmental and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (Ladakh)
- Thanal (Kerala)
- Timbaktu Collective (Andhra Pradesh)
- Titli Trust (Uttarakhand)
- Tribal Health Initiative (Tamil Nadu)
- URMUL (Rajasthan)
- Video Volunteers (Goa)



Individuals

- Dinesh Abrol (Delhi)
- Ovais Sultan Khan (Delhi)
- Sangeetha Sriram (Auroville)
- Sanskriti Menon (Pune)
- Sushma Iyengar (Bhuj)
- Tashi Morup, Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (Ladakh)



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We commit to an India that is just, equitable, and sustainable for today's and coming generations, where:

- the well-being and health of all are ensured by providing opportunities to engage in materially, culturally, ethically and spiritually fulfilling lives and livelihoods;
- everyone has meaningful avenues of directly participating in decision-making through direct forms of democracy;
- there is no discrimination based on gender, caste, class, ethnicity, religion, 'race', ability, sexual orientation, and other such features;
- the diversity and pluralism of cultures and knowledges and faiths are respected and enabled to co-exist harmoniously; and
- there is respect for the rest of nature and the ecological conditions on which all life depends.

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