

FIREFLIES DIALOGUES 2016

AN ANNUAL EVENT OF THE MEETING RIVERS PROGRAMME OF PIPAL TREE, BANGALORE



Pipal Tree



Meeting
Rivers



THEME SUSTAINABLE JOURNEYS

DATE: 4-7 FEBRUARY 2016

VENUE: FIREFLIES INTERCULTURAL CENTRE, BANGALORE-INDIA

REPORT

A BRIEF SUMMARY

The 7th edition of February Dialogues, rechristened as 'Fireflies Dialogues', an annual event of the Meeting Rivers programme of Pipal Tree, Bangalore (India) and Dialogues en Humanité, Lyon (France) was held at Fireflies Inter-cultural Centre, Bangalore from 4th February to 7th February of 2016.

The theme of this year's dialogues was 'Sustainable Journeys'. The key areas focused during the dialogues included women's struggle for dignity and democratic rights, the challenge of creating climate-neutral communities and villages, alternative marketing strategies which connect the producer farmer with the consumer and, peace, pluralism and pro-active religious and secular perspectives in

the context of conflicting world views.

The 2016 dialogues witnessed a large number of participants from different parts of the world. Over 100 people from India, France, Australia, USA and Japan consisting of educators, activists, writers, journalists and students attended the programme. Please see Annexure-2 for the participants list.

Here follows a brief summary of major interventions at the Dialogues:

Ashish Kothari in his keynote address said that ecological sustainability, social well-being and justice, direct democracy, economic democracy and cultural knowledge diversity are the five pillars



that are essential for the existence of a sustainable and equitable society.

Dominic M. D'souza, stated that the institutionalization of education has reduced the meaning of 'learning'.

'Education', he said, needs to be understood, and the terminology 'life-long learning' should be emphasized, in the context of sustainable futures. Sustainability of a community is permanent only when it can adapt to the changing scenario.

T. Pradeep's climate-neutral or carbon-neutral village is conceptually situated at the intersection of mitigation and adaptation. The focus is on people, public resources, livelihood, management of natural resources and sustainable agriculture. The practices adopted introduce the communities with strategies to cope with climate change.

The 'Just Change' concept of Stan Thekaekara demonstrates that an alternate sustainable economy or a fair trade economy can be developed where consumers, producers and investors mutually benefit from their market activity. The concept is based on the theory that producers are also consumers.

The notion of 'Religion, Secularism and Pluralism' was discussed at the Dialogues from the context of refugees flooding into Europe. The Christian and the Islamic ideologies can be experientially enriched when engaged within the overarching perspective of inter faith communities.

Genevieve Ancel said that the existence of a pluralistic world can be recognized by following the path of 'Earth Citizenship' with its flagship ideals of liberty, equality

and fraternity. This transformation to being more tolerant and open-minded should be she said be the way to deal with the refugee crisis.

Yudhishtir Raj Isar said that however difficult it is to live peacefully in today's globalized world the present multi-ethnic and multi-religious heterogeneous societies require intercultural competencies. The real challenge he said is to engage the fundamentalist streams within each religion in a dialogue. Unfortunately the ground reality is ignored and such intercultural inter-religious dialogues are not happening where they are urgently needed.

Naaz Khair said that the teachings of the Prophet promote religious freedom and are not against the concept of human rights and individual freedom.

A reading taken from the writings of Bonhoeffer by David Selvaraj and Fr. Saju Samuel exposed the social dimension of the gospel and Christianity's role in the secular world. To quote Bonhoeffer, "The Church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving.....A person committed to being a disciple of Jesus must live a secular life of one who has been freed from false religious obligations and inhibitions".

Although scriptures of all religions teach acceptance and respect for other faith and traditions, most people have tremendous difficulty in changing their perspective and listening to others perspectives. Ashok Panikkar, based on his experience in the field of working with cross-cultural groups in conflict resolution said it is extremely difficult to live in a diverse environment.

Makarand's perspective on spirituality for sustainable futures emphasized that the organized formal religions, and all the 'isms' were unable to find a solution to the planetary crisis. A new form of spirituality he said along with technology is the only possible way out of this crisis.

The theme of 'women's struggle for dignity and democratic rights' was graphically underlined in the Dialogues with two performances. Maya Krishna Rao focused on the fundamental right to safety in public spaces by highlighting the Delhi

DETAILED REPORT:

The 2016 Fireflies Dialogues commenced with an introductory and welcome note by Genevieve Ancel, co-founder and coordinator of Dialogues en Humanité and Siddhartha, founder and director of Pipal Tree and Fireflies Ashram.

Genevieve talked about the importance of COP21 oath titled as 'Citizens of the Earth: Let us Create Our Own Power' which encourages one to create a new sphere of political action acknowledging the diversity and unity of people and recognizing the rights and responsibilities of every human being towards each other and towards nature.

gang rape case and Rama Mani enacted the unique capacity of women of the world to transform their pain to power. She dramatically portrayed women in different parts of the world who were risking the odds to bring about a paradigm shift and shape an inclusive compassionate future.

The programme schedule of the event and a brief note on the speakers and facilitators are provided in Annexure-1.

Siddhartha expressed his concerns over rising intolerance in the world with references to the refugee crisis in Syria and the Dadri incident in India. He further discussed his views on the relationship between religion and secularism in which he believes that religion can easily lose its way, become subjective or manipulated by politics.

The participants were then asked to form groups of four to five people to share their views on 'sustainable journey'. Following are some of the reflections that came up from the participants during the discussion.

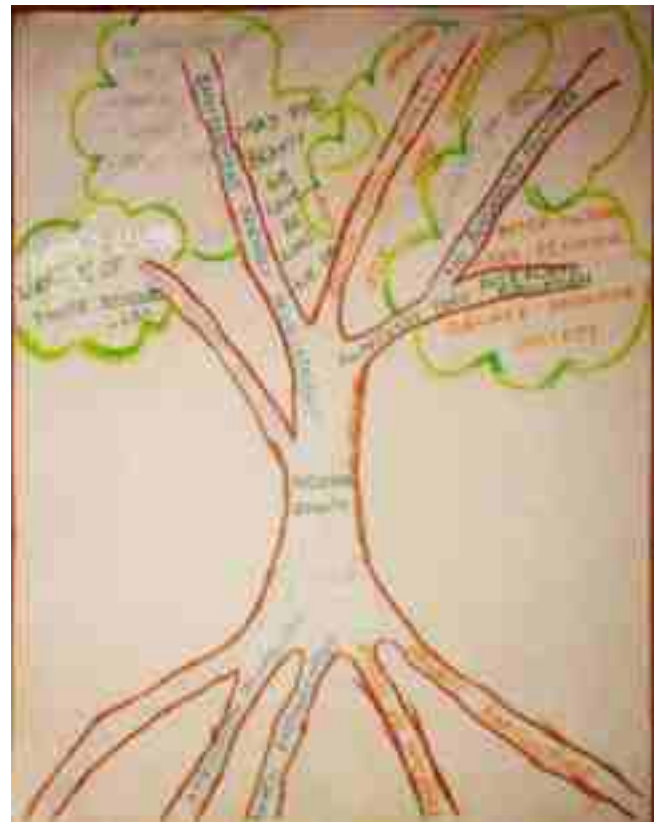


α Mindful usage of finite resources

α Responsible to earth, nature and each other

- α Environment friendly development
- α Radical joyful simplicity
- α Inter-cultural, inter-religious, gender sensitive society
- α Addressing sociological, economic and ecological aspects of sustainability
- α Awareness through alternate education
- α No borders, no frontiers, because we are citizens of earth
- α May the beauty we love be what we do
- α Going away from an economic system where something has to be destroyed in order to create something
- α Human v/s nature conflict
- α Gandhian principle of ‘think globally, act locally’
- α Inclusive growth
- α ‘My needs’ is the root cause: redefine ‘my needs’
- α The concept of ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘myself’ should be changed to ‘we’

- α First step to the path of sustainability should come from within oneself
- α Spirituality/pluralism
- α Women empowerment
- α Freedom of choice
- α Organic agriculture
- α Love, Hope and Optimism
- α Social values
- α Cooperation so that we can learn from others
- α Inter-connectedness – all are connected and all are shared
- α GDP v/s GNP : Gross Domestic Product v/s Gross National Happiness
- α Excluding greed from the sustainable journeys
- α Sustainable development through cultural/art forms
- α Waste management: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle



DIALOGUES ON SUSTAINABILITY

Ashish Kothari, founder-member of 'Kalpavriksh', an environmental research and action group started off the dialogue on sustainability and 'sustainable development', by referring to '**Radical Ecological Democracy**'. The session was moderated by Veena Pai, coordinator at Pipal Tree.

The first part of his talk focused on issues related to the current model of economic and political governance. The second part looked at solutions, transformations and responses to the multiple crises that civil society organizations were facing and the sustained efforts made to find solutions. The committed work done was gradually evolving to the creation of a broader framework for an alternative society.

He continued "The definition of 'development' has come down to economic growth at any cost without giving consideration to nature, cultures, communities and individuals." The current dominant system is in providing solutions like techno fixes, green growth, REDD/REDD+, CDM, geoengineering to sustainable development and climate issues, which he thinks is false or partial solutions. However, a fundamental

transformation is needed to make peace with the earth and with ourselves. According to Ashish, resistance to destructive development processes is a bigger part of the alternative strategies to find solutions. Resistance by the victims can act as a mirror to others who are not directly impacted by the issue.

He presented the framework for transformational alternatives as a recipe consisting of 4 major ingredients: a new politics, a new economics, a just society, ways of knowing, with values and principles undergirding this vision. This will create a dish of solutions called 'Eco-swaraj: Radical Ecological Democracy'.

A new politics meant creating swaraj or self-rule to make people self-reliant to deal with the governance and issues in their own communities and villages. It must emerge through direct democracy, embedded/delegated democracy and eco-regional decision making. A direct democracy will not be possible unless the people don't have control over the economics of what they are doing.

Economics/arthashastra must consider earth; not ignore ecology and environment.



A new economics should be able to revitalize the economy of the village through localization in terms of self-sufficiency and sovereignty in basic needs, locally controlled production and consumption, local currencies and non-monetized exchanges, keeping in mind the ecological/planetary limits.

Equality amongst classes, castes, women and men, ethnic groups, abled and 'disabled' and humans and rest of nature is inevitable in creating a just society. Economic globalization and modernization has created a homogenization within everyone rather than accepting diversity in cultures and knowledges.

He concluded his talk by emphasising the five pillars that are essential for the existence of a sustainable and equitable society; ecological sustainability, social well-being and justice, direct democracy, economic democracy and cultural knowledge diversity.

The keynote address was followed by a panel on practice of sustainability consisting three panelists: Dominic M. D'souza (Associate Director of 'Laya', an organization working with tribal communities in Andhra Pradesh, India), T. Pradeep (Founder of 'iSquareD', which promotes the concept and practice of the Climate-Neutral Village) and Stan Thekaekara (Founder of Just Change India, a community led initiative that seeks to regain power in markets by directly linking

producers, consumers and investors in a network that is mutually beneficial). The panel was moderated by Ashwani Vasishth, Professor of Sustainability Planning at Ramapo College, New Jersey.

The first panelist, **Dominic M. D'souza** shared his views on the topic '**Lifelong Learning in the Context of Sustainable Futures**'. We have condensed the meaning of 'learning' to 'institutionalized education', like we have reduced 'tooth paste' to 'Colgate', he said. Similarly, the universal declaration of human rights in 1948 has changed the understanding of education to human rights or public good. The problem lies in understanding the difference between 'learning' and 'education'. The recent 'Education 2030 Framework for Action' and education being a part of 17 Sustainable Development Goals indicate that an increased importance have now been put into education in a broader sense than earlier by emphasizing the terminology 'lifelong learning'. Lifelong learning can be defined as learning throughout life involving early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary and adult education. However, there is not much emphasis on adult education.

He explained Laya's involvement in creating educational opportunities, safeguarding Adivasi rights and promoting sustainable development alternatives through herbal-based community health



care and sustainable resource management focusing on forest and agriculture in the tribal areas of Northern Andhra Pradesh.

Laya's educational activities cover areas like training on preparation and treatment using traditional herbal plants, providing opportunities for school drop-out youth (around 600 in numbers) in the community-based organizations, 10 days crash-course on literacy through community learning centers with extended support for six months, presenting lectures twice a week in six schools on the science of climate change, political-economy, ethics and value framework and relevant action plans, engaging local administration and media in climate change education processes.

Panel on sustainability practices continued with the talk of **T. Pradeep** on '**The Practice and Challenges of Climate-neutral Villages**'. His presentation focused on the interplay between counting carbon emissions by per-capita and per-country considering there are 638000 villages in India.

The idea of climate-neutral villages came up with the realization that people who will be affected most by climate change will be the people who contribute the least and the question here is how to align climate programs with poverty. The climate-neutral village focuses on people, public resources, livelihood, natural resources management and sustainable agriculture and provides milestones that enable the poor to cope up with climate change.

A research finding found that 83% of the carbon footprint of a village comes from domestic cooking. There is a substantial

quantum of emissions when we consider the existence of 120 million households in India which uses firewood for their fuel, Samuha introduced CDM cook stove projects in 150 villages which saved over 60000t/CO₂e generated.

The communities are encouraged to adapt the technologies once the emission reduction value of a technology is established. Non-pesticide management (NPM) crops, water savings through integrated crop management, community-guaranteed Water credits (CgWCs), recharging open wells, creating water sheds and tanks and solar generators are some of the initiatives introduced to the communities as part of the climate-change adaptation strategies.

The third panelist on sustainability practices, **Stan Thekaekara** shared his work on **creating a fair trade economy where consumer, producer and investor mutually benefit from their market activity**. 'Just Change India' organization was able to help the Adivasis in the Nilgiri District of Tamil Nadu to claim back their land through land movements and to start tea plantations. "Our economic system is aligned towards one who owns capital", he said. While the farmers/producers get cheap money for his/her produce and customers pay a huge sum for the products, it is the middleman or one who owns capital that benefits. In the given situation, what's our role? Do we remain silent participants or do something? This led 'Just Change' to come forward and create an alternative solution. The dilemma that they faced was finding solutions in a capitalist economy where the problems have been created by the same capitalist economy. Their solution was to create an

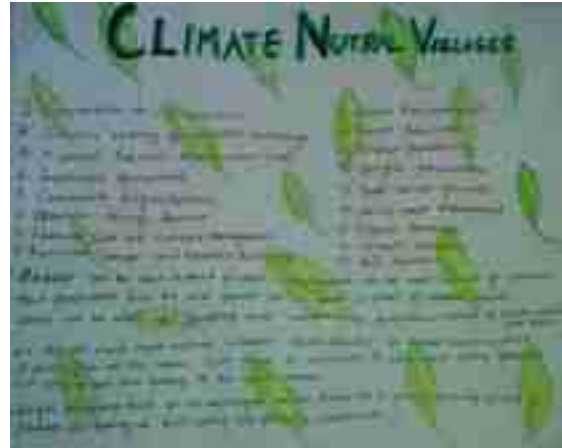
alternate economy based on the theory that producers are also consumers. Direct link between producers and consumers is established by creating a network of producers and consumers who were exchanging goods within a system. An intermediary known as 'Just Change India Producing Company' with four shareholders and 9 participant groups was

formed and they came up with the concept of 'participative capital' which means capital does not get ownership rights as it does in the present free market economy but only gets participative rights along with producers and consumers and the sharing basis of surplus is mutually decided by the producer, consumer and the investor.

GROUP DIALOGUES

The panel on sustainability was followed by small group dialogues on lifelong learning for sustainability, alternative economy, climate-neutral villages and radical ecological democracy, facilitated by the respective forenoon speakers.





DIALOGUE ON RELIGION, SECULARISM AND PLURALISM

This part of the dialogues constituted a panel discussion including five panelists sharing their views on **‘Religion, Secularism and Pluralism’** and a session by Makarand Paranjape on ‘Beyond Religion: Spirituality for Sustainable Futures’. The moderator of the panel, **Siddhartha** said “The Big Bang happened 15 billion years ago and earth came into being about 5 million years. For pedagogical purpose, if you consider 5 million years as one year, then the first single cell organism emerged about 8 months down the line and human beings emerged in the last 24 hours, religions are only half an hour old, modern science and technology only two minutes old. It’s very clear that the human beings created religions and gods and these religions and gods are creating a tremendous anxiety in

the world instigated by politics or economics”. He further mentioned that there should be an inclusive secularism with human rights at one end and faith, traditions and communities at the other end. In his words, “religion should not follow a closed dogmatic approach, but should be an open ended journey”.

Genevieve Ancel, Co-founder and Coordinator of ‘Dialogues en Humanite’ and special adviser on change management in Lyon started the panel by looking into the refugee crisis in Europe. She pointed out that 40,000 migrants died at different borders in the world during the period of 2000-2014. 5000 lost their lives in 2015 alone. Among the 22 million Syrian refugees, 8 million had to relocate inside the country and 4.5 million are in exile.



She expressed that the hypocrisy, communication strategies and selfishness of some of the present leaders in Europe is outrageous. Declaration by a French far right elected nationalist fascist party leader is against providing subsidies to organizations which support migrants. This reveals how the European countries deal with the migratory crisis. There have been walls and fences erected in Hungary, Calais and Mexico to prevent migration. This only worsened the current situation. Refugees are in fact a growth factor in the context of local and global economic uncertainty. Our response to these crises should be through more democracy, open-mindedness and tolerance. We should follow a path of 'Earth Citizenship' through liberty, equality and fraternity.

Yudhishtir Raj Isar, Professor of Global Communication, International and Comparative Politics at the American University of Paris, looked at Religion, Secularism and Pluralism **from an overarching perspective**. Basically an atheist, he has an abiding interest as an anthropologist in religion. He believes that religious beliefs, values and institutions are a central pillar for individuals and for collectivities to organize social relations and lead individual and collective lives.

The multi-ethnic multi-religious heterogeneous societies of today require intercultural competencies, however

difficult it is, to live peacefully in a globalised world. The real challenge is to engage the fundamentalist streams within each religion in a dialogue. Unfortunately such intercultural inter-religious dialogues are not happening where they are urgently needed, and are not built on on-the-ground realities.

“The challenge is to create a public space that cherishes plural identities”, he said quoting Bhikhu Parekh, who said “‘We’ cannot integrate ‘them’ as long as ‘we’ remain ‘we’; ‘we’ must be loosened up to create a new common space in which ‘they’ can be accommodated and become part of a newly constituted ‘we’.



Next panelist, **Naaz Khair**, an independent freelance consultant who is actively involved in advocating educational issues of tribal, dalit and minority communities (especially, Muslims), expressed her views on 'Religion, Secularism and Pluralism' **from an Islamic perspective**. She reflected that people's views on Islam being incompatible with secularism get reinforced when some Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia term secularism to be *haraam* (a sin) and anti-Islam”.

As Asghar Ali Engineer says, in every religion there are both liberal as well as conservative trends. And, both quote



scriptures in support of their respective positions. Quran verse, “Allah’s creative power is dynamic...everyday He manifests Himself in yet another (wondrous) way” (chapter 29, verse 55) reflects that Quran scriptures are not in relation to a static social situation but respond to evolving and changing social situations.

The problem arose when the model of ‘Khilafat’ or ‘Islamic state’ is considered as ideal by Islamic theologians and subsequent generations. Naaz addressed whether Islam and Secularism can go together by referring to the distinction between *deen* (religion) and *minhaj* (secular aspect of religion). Maulana Wahiuddin Khan says all the prophets were revealed the same *deen* or religion in the same form (chapter 42, verse 13), the *minhaj* (method) of all the prophets was different (Chapter 5, verse 48). However extremists (“Do not commit excess in your religion”; chapter 4, verse 171) fail to differentiate between *deen* and *Minhaj* i.e. secular and religious aspects of Islam.

She further said, “in the age of religious freedom that we live in, the order to fight to end religious persecution is no longer applicable in our age. Therefore, Muslims must completely abstain from engaging in such violence”. Chapter 2, verse 148 of Quran directly promotes religious pluralism; “one must respect others faith,

each religion has its own form of worship, we must not quarrel with each other, instead excel each other in good deeds”. Naaz’s views from Islamic perspective revealed that teachings as embodied in the Quran and sunnah of the Prophet are not against the concept of human rights and individual freedom (freedom of conscience). It is authoritarian rulers of some Muslim countries who denounce the concept of human rights as alien to Islam.

The panel on Religion, Secularism and Pluralism’ continued with **David Selvaraj**, Priest, and Founder of ‘Visthar’, an Academy of Justice and Peace, and his colleague, **Rev.Fr. Saju Samuel**, sharing their views **from a Christian perspective** through a reading of Bonhoeffer. David Selvaraj provided an introduction on Bonhoeffer and Saju Samuel spoke about the relevance of Bonhoeffer in contemporary India.

David said it was the Godhra and Ahmadabad incidents and the civil war in Sri Lanka that brought him to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor, theologian. He was an anti-Nazi dissident, and key founding member of the Confessing Church. Bonhoeffer’s writings reflect Christianity's role in the secular world and have become widely



influential. David read out a couple of sections from Bonhoeffer's collection titled 'Letters and Papers from Prison'. "The Church is the Church only when it exists for others. To make a start it should give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in some secular calling. The Church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others. In particular our own church will have to take the field against the vices of hubris, power-worship, envy, and humbug, considering them as the roots of all evil."

"A person committed to being a disciple of Jesus must live in the godless world without attempting to gloss over or explain its ungodliness in some religious way or the other. He/She must live a secular life and thereby share in God's sufferings. He may live a secular life of one who has been freed from false religious obligations and inhibitions. To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to make something of oneself on the basis of some method or the other, but to be a human - not a type of human, but the human that Christ creates in us. It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life."

Rev. Saju Samuel described Bonhoeffer as a man who stood for his faith by using his faith for political change. He discussed the role of religion in the State by quoting Bonhoeffer; "What we should see in religion is ethical responsible action. Wherever human rights are violated and

wherever fascism is introduced or initiated, the church/religion has to take a step forward".



The last panelist was **Ashok Panikkar**, founder of 'Meta-Culture', an organisation dedicated to the practice of conflict resolution, relationship management and dialogue. Being a person who works closely on religious issues, harmony and peace, he talked about '**Inter-faith Engagement: Beyond Platitudes and Wishful Thinking**'. From the experience of working with cross-cultural groups in the field of conflict resolutions using different modalities like mediations, dialogues and facilitations, he referred that it is extremely difficult to live in a diverse environment and should critically examine whether diversity is a good idea all the time, particularly when we don't know how to manage it and when we don't wish to manage it.

He said, "A realistic approach needs to be taken if we want to imagine a better future. Platitudes/wishful thinking won't get us very far". He further explained about the program their organization have been working on for three years which started off as a dialogue between the Hindus and the Christians in Mangalore Karnataka after the attack on Christian churches in 2008. Later on they extended this process to a dialogue between the extremist Hindus and the Muslims (excluding secularists

from the discussion). This came from the realization that bringing extremists who strongly believe in their religion like VHP, RSS, Jamati Islami and Islamic Student Union is needed to really address the issues. Their challenge was to bring these people together and create a space for them where they can be so honest that they may offend each other and keeping that space safe at the same time. Ashok referred these dialogues as a process which challenges people at the root of their assumptions and it is the most subversive thing that can happen on the earth between human beings.

These dialogues revealed that most people have tremendous difficulty in changing their perspectives at the same time to listen to others perspectives. They weren't able to continue this project after three years due to the intolerance issues. They are now in the process of creating a project to work with Muslims who were part of the Hindu-Muslim dialogue discussing the state of Muslims in the global community.

The moderator, **Siddhartha** ended the panel on 'Religion, Secularism and Pluralism' by quoting Buddha, "We are our thoughts" and reflecting that "being a Hindu/Muslim/Christian is a construction; these are ephemeral, there is no ontological Hindu/Muslim/Christian. These constructions need to be looked into and deconstructed to find a common humanity".

Makarand Paranjape's session looked into **spirituality for sustainable futures beyond religion**. He is an author and professor of English at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. The session was chaired by **Anjali Gera Roy**,

Professor of English, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur.

Makarand spoke about paradigm changes. Quoting Thomas Kuhn, he said "when the paradigm changes, everything that was true in the earlier paradigm doesn't hold.



His overview of the paradigm changes focused on the evolution of human beings, changes in the population rate, disappearing cultural sub-groups of human beings, languages, species extinction, etc. He said, "the human history and civilization seems to be undergoing rapid acceleration and we are heading into or already entered into a planetary crisis which is not just ecological, but is also economic". Religion, as a system of human organization with components like churches, dogmas, promises of eternal life and threats of eternal damnation, is unable to find a solution to this crisis. Along with religion, all the 'isms' such as communism, socialism, capitalism, etc. also failed in addressing the question of planetary crisis. Even science is not able to comprehend this. He further said, "the problems of the world are so complex considering the multidimensionality and unprecedented nature of the planetary crisis that no single paradigm/ theory/ system/'ism' is sufficient to address them. Our present capacities, resources and consciousness are inadequate to fight the battle to save ourselves or our planet".

His suggestion to the crisis was to create a new form of spirituality which is a new form of reason, which doesn't deny reason, but is more than reason, which would lead to a new integrative paradigm with new material, new matter, new plasma, new

consciousness, new forms of intelligence, new energy and new ways to manipulate our environment. And this transformation is something in which spirituality/yoga and science/technology will have to come together.

DIALOGUE ON WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR DIGNITY AND DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

The 2016 Fireflies Dialogues witnessed theatre artists, Maya Krishna Rao and Rama Mani, conveying one of the key messages of the Dialogues, women's struggle for dignity and democratic rights.

Maya Krishna Rao has served in various fields as an actor, director, writer, educator and activist and has become the recipient of Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for her contribution to Indian theatre as an actor. She is also the founder-member of a street theatre group, 'Theatre Union'. Her session was moderated by **Lilian Sum**, Director of 'Sacred Earth Trust', an organization which supports and encourages the sustainable development. Maya offered her famous performance titled 'Walk' which had been prepared in response to the brutal gang rape and tragic death of the young physiotherapy intern, Jyothi Singh on a moving bus in Delhi in December 2012. Throughout her performance she raised a basic question of fundamental right to safety in public

spaces; can I walk through the streets of my city at the stroke of midnight? Can I lie on a bench in the park? She asks.

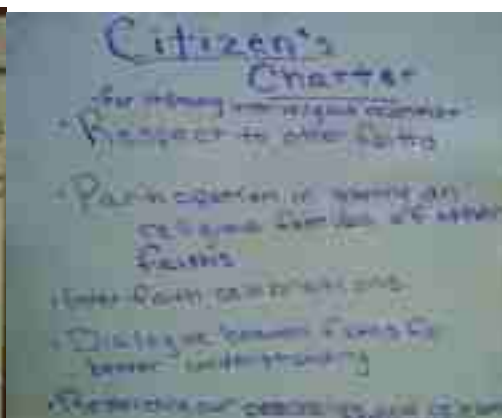
The second session on women's issues was presented by **Rama Mani**, a Poet, Performance Artist, Peace builder, Founder of Theatre of Integral Transformation and Co-founder of Rising Women Rising World. **Manvel Alur**, an independent consultant on environmental issues and the moderator of the session, called out to the participants to keep their cerebral thinking behind and bring forth all the other senses to relate and connect with the performance. Rama's performance titled, '**Women's Voices and Wisdom for Peace and Justice**' involved enacting of stories of real women from all continents and brought to life the unique capacity of women of the world to transform their pain to power, and their suffering to strength. She portrayed how women are risking the odds to bring about a paradigm shift and shape an inclusive compassionate future.



OPEN DIALOGUE SESSIONS:

The 2016 Fireflies Dialogues also included 'Open Dialogue Sessions', wherein interested participants were allowed to facilitate sessions on their area of interest. There were six of such sessions on the following topics:

- α Cosmic Oneness - Integral Dialogue; Poetry, Music, Art and Dance *by Maggie Gonsalves*
- α Framing Citizen's Charter for Inclusive, Communal/ Social Harmony *by Mohammad Turab*
- α Connect with Individual Collective Cosmic Energy *by George Kunnath*
- α Teaching Sustainability through Dance *by Megha Nugehally*
- α An Integral Creative Dialogue on Transforming Dystopia to Co-creating a Culture of Me, Us and Ours *by Rama Mani and others*



OTHER ACTIVITIES:

Drum Circles:

One of the evenings of the dialogues involved 'Drum Circles' facilitated by **Ashirwas S Acharekar**, who is a software engineer by profession and a percussionist at heart. It was a successful and energetic participatory session which revitalized the mind-body connection. Participants felt it as a form of dialogue which enabled them to connect with each other and mother earth.

Herbarium:

A series of paintings, called as 'Herbarium', a work against deforestation using a steamroller and plant fragments impregnated with paint, by a famous French artist Michel Granger were exhibited during the Fireflies Dialogues. These paintings were created using rollers as 'tool' instead of brushes and the paint being associated with the plant - branches, leaves, flowers and herbs – sandwiched between two wires, crushed by the rollers that weigh between 12 and 19 tons.

Interplay:

Interplay was conducted throughout the course of the Dialogues as a tool to create awareness within oneself. These sessions were facilitated by **Prasanth Olalekar**, a creative spiritual leader and former director of Pasayadaan Holistic Spirituality Centre and **Hazel Lobo**, a practicing counsellor and psychotherapist.

Fireflies Campus Tour:

The Dialogue participants accompanied Siddhartha in a campus tour of Fireflies in the evening of 5th Feb. The tour introduced participants with the history of Fireflies and its art.

Cultural Evening:

A cultural programme session involving music, dance and performances by participants took place as part of the Fireflies Dialogues under the facilitation of Oamjie John, Coordinator of Media Programme, Pipal Tree.





CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The 2016 Fireflies Dialogues concluded with four panelists sharing their insights from the Dialogues and views on aspects related to culture, society, environment and sustainability that can contribute to sustainable futures.

John Clammer, Professor in the Institute for Advance Studies in Sustainability at the United Nations University, Tokyo, and

Director of the Earth Institute, chaired the concluding panel.

The first panelist, **Marcus Bussey**, author and professor of World History and Future Studies at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia, talked about the need for a new language i.e. a new way of being because language shows us the way we are. He explained that there is nothing normal about the period of transition. We

need identity mutations to occur where the path remains the same (I'm still me), but changes are taking place (I'm doing things differently).

He further said, "Spirituality really should be all about rationality- being aware that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves that brings meaning and magic to our lives. We are related in many ways, beyond this discrete body. We run these sustainable journeys because we yearn for something and this yearning is the core of spirituality. Spirituality as a mystical form is to break down those barriers of mind and soul that keeps oneself isolated. Spirituality is an invitation to embrace that yearning and acknowledge that it is the cosmos at the heart of all sustainable journeys."

According to **M.P. Parameswaran** (People's Science Activist with the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad), the question is not how to prevent climate change, but to adapt to that global change. There should be an economic system where we produce only welfare value and no vanity values which Gandhi described as greed. Concept

of wealth should be of gross national leisure or gross national happiness where there exists a possibility for human beings to do what makes them happy.

Ananta Kumar Giri, Professor of Sociology at Madras Institute of Development Studies, looked at the aspects of transforming sustainable journeys, co-walking meditation, a new poetics of integral development and dance of planetary realization in his concluding speech.

He said, "We need to transform the language of sustainability into something like mutual blossoming and universal self-realization and co-realization. We must transform our idea of sustainable journey from the known to walking, meditating and dancing together." He ended his concluding remarks by reciting a poem which was expressed through a dance by one of the participants, **Negha Nugehally**.

Ashwani Vasishth, Professor of sustainability planning at Ramapo College, New Jersey, referred sustainability as a journey, but more than that an attitude or



worldview (how you think about the world before you begin to think). He said, “We should focus on adaptive management where you make an action, you see consequences, you adjust your action and

you adapt as you go along. You make interventions, you pay attention to consequences and we will be alright, we really will”.

- *Report by Sharon Paul*

[Click here for listening to the audio recordings of the sessions](#)

[Click here for the PowerPoint Presentations from the Dialogues](#)

[Click here for a few photographs from the event](#)

FEEDBACK FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

HAS THIS EVENT HELPED YOU IN DEEPENING YOUR UNDERSTANDING ON THE TOPICS DISCUSSED? IF YES, PLEASE MENTION THE AREAS.

- α Contribution of culture
- α Importance and forms of dialogue
- α Contribution/ role of organizations like Fireflies at a time when the world is engaged in strife
- α Life-long learning in the context of sustainable journey
- α The practice and challenges of climate neutral villages
- α More than deepening, a new perspective emerges to act with a new vigor.
- α Strengthening networks to achieve success in people in governance at local and national level.
- α Yes, dialogue should be a process. Sustainability affects everyone at every level.
- α Sustainability framework
- α Use of theatre and audio visual communication methods towards community education awareness and empowerment.
- α Yes. Towards a larger extent, it was very helpful to learn the contemporary trends. The diversified topics with the real key players in the field added the strength to the learning.
- α Yes, sustainable development and social justice
- α Yes, I felt very connected to and impacted by the women’s issues.
- α The struggles faced by different groups based on their religion or gender.
- α This event has made me more aware of the issues going on and has given me a deeper understanding of the issues India is facing.
- α Yes, definitely on sustainability and movements and practices in India
- α Yes, ground level issues of sustainability in India and inter-religious dialogue and conflict resolution.
- α Immensely. All the topics were very relevant and interesting and very needed for sustainable journeys together in this world. Rama Mani’s ‘Women Voices’ was very impressive in bringing out women’s frustrations

and voicing out for a better living and for justice.

- α Yes, spirituality in realm of sustainability and importance of the role of religion in modern state.
- α Alternative economy and creative expression and finding aspect of sustainability through art.
- α Alternative economy, sustainability and spirituality with a reinforcement of ideas
- α Yes, especially on environment and sustainability
- α Yes, alternative democracy. Presentation on Islam has deepened my understanding.
- α Yes, I liked both the performances on women's issues, drum sessions, sessions by Megha Nugehally, Ashish Kothari and Genevieve Ancel.
- α Yes, Insight into various initiatives being attempted in the spaces
- α Yes, this event has helped me a lot. It cleared my concepts on how sustainability deals in different areas and got to know many outstanding people who work for societal and other cause.
- α Yes, Session by Rama Mani impacted me a lot and I was able to connect. Drum session gave me a lot of energy.
- α First of such event to attend, and hence, it has helped to develop an understanding for these discussed topics
- α Women's rights were accentuated
- α Sustainable alternative in NRM, education, cleaning. Cultural events as a medium for dialogue, sharing and learning.
- α In terms of creating a more united world though religions my perspective has changed. At first I never saw

religion as a part of the solution, but in order to break the categorizations we put ourselves in it is necessary.

- α Yes, creative education, climate changes and secularism
- α Yes, of course. 'Life-long learning' - taking back control of our economy, creative education, religion panel from an Islamic perspective and 'Women's voices' by Rama Mani
- α Yes, it has definitely deepened my understanding of different applications of my academic studies.
- α This is a unique event. It has elevated my mind, body, soul, family and profession.
- α Yes, especially the integration/interfaces between science and spirituality
- α Absolutely yes, especially women's rights and sustainability
- α Lifelong learning in the context of sustainable futures
- α Since the topics were very well related to the theme of the Dialogues, it certainly helped to increase my understanding. However, among different methods of dialogue the theatre media more effectively conveyed the message..
- α Concept of being sustainable, Relating and managing differences, Religion and being secular and Power of women in my life
- α Yes. More clarity on sustainability, the need to articulate, share positive energies and paradigms of change.
- α The areas of inter-religious/faith dialogue and women and their need for freedom
- α Biodiversity conservation, sustainable development of traditional crops cultivation (millets)

- α Yes, education and organic agriculture
- α There is definitely a paradigm shift in my outlook. I am of the conviction that you need to have many more women speakers/presenters. Feminine ways of

presentation in any area of work. Drum circle by Ashirwad, Walk by Maya Krishna Rao and Rama Mani's session were my areas of deepening.

WHAT ARE THE CONCRETE ACTIONS YOU WOULD TAKE UP AS A RESULT OF PARTICIPATING IN THIS EVENT.

AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- α Promote alternatives for a climate neutral village
- α To create alternate education in one target area
- α Help small and medium NGOs in their endeavor
- α Whatever areas that would bring in a positive energy
- α Involve more and more people in sustainable journey of equity, equality and harmony in the society.
- α It gives me motivation to continue to work for social change.
- α Continue document, research and film innovative solutions to water, sustainable livelihood issues (Rural/urban). Continue and increase the reach and enrich community engagement.
- α Be more sustainably oriented – recycle more
- α I can organize events like this to impact people at a larger level
- α I would bring change at my personal level and bring about our utopia.
- α Write more
- α Work on films and communication that trigger thought and action
- α I will start thinking before taking any action
- α To listen to more and more to the youths of India
- α Follow up visits to some of the participants' centers and NGOs
- α Taking up implementation and participation in concepts like 'Just Change' and Herbal Medicine Center of 'LAYA'
- α Meet more people to understand how to begin the process of change towards sustainable futures
- α Get involved in more NGOs and grass root level organizations
- α Continue my research in the field of Maths and modern technology that can ultimately help marginalized farmers
- α Transforming self to be a better individual and work for transformed sustainable communities and world together.
- α Deepen my research and knowledge in these areas
- α Read more and be better informed on social movements and initiatives in the Adivasi and Dalit communities which I think are a ferment for social struggles
- α Help people whenever I can
- α To develop a model for learning with multiple approach involving different stakeholders, especially artist community
- α Develop a structured plan of action for the next one year in alignment with the foundation's vision.

- α Would like to tie up with NGOs at this dialogue for a better outreach.
- α Take small steps for sustainability
- α Personally, more dialogues between people are something I would consider doing. There needs to be a more universal understanding of what it means to be sustainable.
- α Rather than complaining, I will look into myself and follow my heart. By this way, I would try to understand things in a positive way and try a bit for the transformation.
- α To act more systematically through the campaigns and movements I am involved in.
- α Maintaining clean and green environment in our area
- α Continue to promote the existence of such spaces and facilitate such conversations/dialogues
- α Accumulate all insights and analyze with contemporary issues and finally find a right solution.
- α Create awareness through lots of articles and actions.
- α Create awareness in our area
- α Experimenting and evolving new methods to bring change, especially to the intellectually less privileged vast rural community whose livelihood is becoming unstable as a result of innumerable crises.
- α Getting more in touch with my ‘body’ – physical self
- α Sustainable living
- α Respecting different sources of spirituality
- α Simplify my needs (beginning with clothes)
- α Begin to use interplay and theatre in my classes
- α Plant at least 10 plants each year
- α Create awareness on women empowerment and global environmental issues
- α By providing creative education, I think we can bring sustainability
- α Just carry on the activities I am doing with a deeper awareness of sustainable journeys.
- α Reduce my needs – give more to society
- α Create a meditation garden
- α Whenever I disagree, think of three reasons why I don’t agree with them
- α Choreograph a performance based on the information from the Dialogues.

AT THE COMMUNITY/FAMILY/FRIENDS LEVEL

- α Create awareness on a sustainable journey
- α Provide sanitation to all rural and slum households
- α Rejuvenate, claim the earth
- α To live a frugal sustained life at all levels. At the community level, focus on need than greed. At the family level, live within your reach rather than others’ life style because it comes with a baggage of woes. Let us live a fulfilling life. Attain spirituality in normal living.
- α Motivates me to get my community, family and friends involved as well.
- α Share the knowledge and resources and connect communities and individuals.
- α Start a campaign to reduce plastic water bottle waste in Ramapo college campus

- α Organize event in my locality and share my knowledge with friends
- α CFC - Communication for a cause
- α Bring sustainable development into limelight and start taking a step towards sustainable development and act individually, so that people can follow-up.
- α I would like to invite some of the speakers to my college in order to enlighten others
- α Work on the issue of gender inequality
- α To politicize at the community level
- α I would like to expose the concept of 'Just Change' to the Adivasi communities I work with.
- α Bring in the ideas and concepts from here to our community of farmers, women and teachers
- α Linking people and introducing them to the process of dialogue to initiate change
- α Environmental awareness
- α Conduct more field trials
- α Share the spiritual dimension of what I learnt
- α Reaching and speaking out more
- α Educate people
- α Be a part of community service
- α Facilitate dialogues when intervening with communities
- α At the community level: Our intervention will use different artistic expressions; At the family level: respect family values; At the friends level: encourage them to get involved in the network
- α I'll share what I have learned here and hopefully create a more open dialogue with people.
- α As an individual, I can share what I have learned here to my family, friends and community.
- α At all levels, work for a better world as we are all sojourners in this world
- α Engage with minority sections
- α Encourage and highlight avenues of such meetings, which could help them to develop a similar understanding
- α Contentment happiness in own situation, family, friends circle, person to person conversations
- α Tell them my story and hopefully they will learn from it.
- α Create awareness to people in my district
- α As a whole, the Dialogues helped me connect with others with similar views as well as providing networking opportunities.
- α I will motivate all my staff and community to take up the environmental issues
- α Strive to build strong sustainable community in all our words and deeds.
- α Share my concerns about us as a species and the directions we are heading in collectively
- α Keep on communicating and enlightening others with great insights which I got from this Dialogue. Ask them to do their best in whatever ways to achieve. Start a new forum.
- α Depends, but yes whenever possible and at whatever level depending on need.
- α Excellent input I am carrying to work on my similar project on land.
- α Value sustainable living at the community level; Respect any differences at the family level; Listening to different experiences at the friends level
- α Arrange 'positive' seminars with academicians and others
- α Arrange 'Eco-audit' in the campus



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