

ANUBHAV SHIKSHA KENDRA

YOUTH EXPERIENTIAL
LEARNING PROGRAMME



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CONTRIBUTORS:

Members of YUVA and ASK

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DESIGNED BY:

Tabish Shakil


w: www.yuvaindia.org


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 [@yuvaonline](https://medium.com/@yuvaonline)

e: info@yuvaindia.org

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. PRINCIPLES OF CHANGE: AIMS OF ANUBHAV SHIKSHA KENDRA	3
III. FRAMEWORK AND ACTIVITIES	5
IV. THE PROGRAMME DIFFERENTIATOR	7
V. REMAINING RESPONSIVE TO YOUTH NEEDS	9
VI. PROGRAMME COMPONENTS	11
VII. LEARNING FROM CHALLENGES	13
VIII. YOUTH PROFILES IN FOCUS	14
IX. OFFERING SUPPORT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC	33
X. THE CONTINUING COMMITMENT TO CHANGE	35



I. INTRODUCTION

India has the world's largest youth population (at approximately 1.3 billion)¹. Their potential is immense, yet the youth are often viewed in polarities or stereotyped as a labour force, a troubled generation, and a politically exploitable group. The Government of India has largely declared its mandate for the youth through the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, overlooking the diverse needs of youth across locations and circumstances. To give an example of the government's focus area, the Skill India programme, for instance, has been published with much fanfare to skill 402 million youth by 2022. Yet this programme has been plagued by substandard training and assessment, despite its claim to have reached targets².

Given the deep need to shape youth aspirations and capacities, the non-profit Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) has implemented Anubhav Shiksha Kendra (ASK), an experiential learning programme for youth, since 1993 across districts in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The programme offers the space for youth to build their self-confidence, self- and social awareness to help them engage in purposive action.

For nearly 30 years, ASK processes have helped youth from different communities and backgrounds invest in their own development. Tailored discussions and activities have helped build the capacities of young people oppressed by caste, gender and class-based inequalities.

1 | <https://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/90-million-jobs-by-2030-how-pandemic-threatens-to-derail-prospects-of-the-worlds-largest-youth-population/643508>

2 | <https://scroll.in/article/844871/high-targets-and-wasted-funds-the-problems-in-the-skill-india-programme>

Due to its unique programme design, ASK has grown exponentially. Between 2017–2020, over 147,000 youth (across genders) engaged in the programme, and 27,500+ youth actively engaged as ASK members across 28 districts in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, both in rural and urban environments. Those who become a part of ASK processes have taken forward the knowledge and passion into their communities, inspiring social change and impacting Indian society. This report includes case studies of youth from across various backgrounds and showcases diverse ways in which they have taken their learnings from the ASK process forward.

Outreach	October 2017– March 2020
Total outreach	1,47,161
Female	59,499
Male	87,662
Membership	October 2017– March 2020
Members	27,523
Female	9,934
Male	17,589

Table 1.1. Total outreach and ASK membership from October 2017–March 2020

II. PRINCIPLES OF CHANGE: AIMS OF ANUBHAV SHIKSHA KENDRA

'I want to tell the youth to learn important things such as self-development, critical thinking, capacity building, activities, games. Whatever you learn will be of use. You may not realise that now but it will change your life as it has changed mine.'

- Ansari Asif Mohammed Farooque,
ASK member, Malad (Mumbai)

Anubhav Shiksha Kendra (ASK) is a programme to facilitate young people's learning and growth to help them engage directly in social transformation. The programme connects with urban and rural youth from marginalised caste, gender and income groups to help them express themselves, find and claim their space beyond the mainstream imagination promoted by the State and the market. The core values driving ASK are social justice, gender justice, ecological justice, honesty and integrity, secularism and democracy, and dignity of labour.

The programme has adapted to emerging needs of the youth over the years, but its core focus remains on supporting youth development and youth for development. ASK aims to build capacities of young people to become concerned, responsible citizens who assert their rights and uphold responsibilities as well as engage in the development process of social transformation. Grounded in the framework of participatory democracy and social justice, ASK believes that when the youth are offered the space and support to develop their critical thinking and experiential reflection capacities, they have the ability to change their lives and that of communities. The programme is based on the following principles:

BUILDING YOUTH PERSPECTIVES AND OWNERSHIP FOR CHANGE

The programme is driven by the principle that those who face problems first-hand are best suited to tackle these challenges themselves, with adequate knowledge and

support. Young people are encouraged to share their experiences in participatory and democratic discussion spaces and take part in exposure and exchange visits to understand and build respect for different contexts and challenges, and strengthen the resolve and action for change.

OVERCOMING SOCIETAL STEREOTYPES AND TABOOS

ASK also aims to break stereotypes and taboos in Indian society, encouraging young people to challenge the status quo, explore and strengthen their social and political identities. This has been a challenging task, especially among young girls whose parents have often maintained traditional perceptions of gender-roles. Through constant engagement and dialogue, ASK has managed to overcome this, although it remains an ongoing effort. Over time, efforts have paid and set off a multiplier effect.

For instance, once youth started attending the programme and finding value in it, they encouraged many others to join them and the size of the group grew. Girls who have risen through ASK processes have inspired others to join. They have taken strong stances to demand their rights, leaving a positive impact on their communities as they break away from stereotypes. ASK has also promoted scientific temper among people, encouraging them to not believe blindly in superstitions, but follow a logical and reasoned line of thinking.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

Within the Indian context, given the threats to freedom, attempts to crush dissent and frequent homogenisation of large sections of society (including the youth), the act of change can often seem daunting and overwhelming. ASK facilitates youth empowerment by encouraging the youth to form and strengthen collectives that can raise a strong voice against injustice, resist political pressure and demand progress. ASK promotes group-strengthening by creating safe spaces and organising engaging activities where a feeling of freedom and openness is fostered, giving young people the opportunity to develop personal and group capacities.

POLITICAL CONSCIENTISATION

ASK encourages youth oppressed by caste- and class-based oppression to reclaim values of democracy and social justice. This form of youth work, led by ideals of participatory democracy, social justice and human rights, recognises and encourages young people's rights to self-determine their future and work towards it.

III.

FRAMEWORK AND ACTIVITIES

The experiential learning format of ASK promotes critical learning, thinking and reflection. Further, it uses the following framework to engage and encourage youth for change:

EXPERIENCE: ASK is grounded in the belief that one's own experiences are an important driver of change. The programme uses a range of activities, discussions, visits, etc. and through their participation and experiential learning, the youth are encouraged to take forward their contributions for change.

SHARE: As participants engage in the programme, they are encouraged to share their observations and insights at every stage.

PROCESS: Thoughts, observations and personal learnings of the youth are analysed, reflected upon and discussed by groups in a process-driven manner to arrive at stronger inferences.

GENERALISE: Learnings and reflections are connected to situations and social issues in the real world, placing them in-context to derive deeper perspectives.

APPLY: Post the application of learnings to real-world contexts and challenges, the youth are encouraged to undertake action on ground for change.

With regular sessions and engagements aimed at promoting empowerment and sharing of values, ASK encourages young people to become agents for change and drive social transformation both in their lives and their communities. Malvani Yuva Parishad (MYP), a local youth collective in Ambujwadi, Malad, for instance, is a great example of young people's use of the ASK programme as a foundation from which to develop their own youth forums. Since its inception in 2014, MYP youth members have taken advantage of their combined passion for change to develop plays about sexual harassment, prepare an agenda for change to local representatives and reclaim spaces for youth play and expression in Malvani, and much more.

Most of the programme's activities can be grouped under the following four categories:

I. YOUTH MOTIVATION sessions aim to help the youth remain committed in the programme and its processes. From the orientation programme which gives young people an insight into the main aims of the sessions to live discussions on, for instance, the youth and their rights, diverse sessions are constantly planned.

II. SOCIAL AWARENESS events, often in collaboration with other institutions and experts, help the youth gain perspective on diverse issues. In September 2019, ASK workshop participants learned more about domestic violence in the Dharavi slum area through a street play performed with the non-profit SNEHA. Constant investment in social awareness has helped the youth develop as informed citizens and remain committed to fight for their rights.

III. YOUTH EXCHANGE is another valuable learning and empowerment tool used by ASK. Exposure visits to different project sites and areas help the youth better understand their surroundings. For instance, a visit to a water treatment plant in Mulund, Mumbai, made the youth aware of the importance of water as a resource and its effective use, the process of water treatment, the manpower and cost required to supply water to Mumbai, and more. The exchange events also help the youth meet other activists, learn about social movements and interact with diverse stakeholders in meaningful ways.

IV. TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING workshops help the youth pick up many valuable skills. The youth enrich these sessions further through their participation, adding their experiences while learning about the value of team building, for instance. The youth have also attended sessions on leadership and active youth citizenship.

The four levels of activities have encouraged youth members to establish collectives in their village and start monitoring government programmes, for instance—a prime example of the ASK objective of promoting youth to engage in participatory governance.

IV. THE PROGRAMME DIFFERENTIATOR

'ASK has taught me how to understand and engage with society. I now conduct different kinds of programmes on the core values of ASK and people look up to me as a social reformer.'

-Prakshik Meshram,
ASK member from Yavatmal

Anubhav Shiksha Kendra (ASK) has succeeded in its aims largely due to its innovative programme design. Sessions and activities that the youth regularly engage in provide live examples of ideal social principles. For example, sessions aimed at building understanding of government schemes, village development plans, citizenship, and constitutional values help the youth better understand all of these schemes and concepts and how they implement on-ground.

The programme's design framework also ensures that the youth drive the change initiatives themselves, and through their participation empower the programme further, increase membership and participation from the youth, to take it ahead. Youth cadres build through three levels of participation. *Mitra* is the first level of participation, where the youth are inducted as concerned citizens, oriented on the programme and encouraged to participate. *Sahayogi* marks the next level of participation, where the youth act as change agents, driving a range of initiatives. *Sathi* marks the peak of engagement and investment in the programme where the youth lead change initiatives, inspiring others to join them and drive change further.

The programme's focus on reaching out to communities with a high degree of socio-economic marginalisation and women emphasises the need to strengthen gender and social justice. After activities, critical reflection and creative expression segments take place between the youth and youth workers, for a detailed debrief and

sharing on the just concluded engagement. Democratic collaborative efforts result in the co-creation of activities and sessions that are more tailored to the needs of the youth. The programme's vision is further realised when young people connect their experiences from the activities and the reflection process to real-world examples and are able to take their work forward with more clarity and confidence. The overall process of implementation, reflection and application keeps ASK receptive to the needs of India's youth, helping them to understand the power of their voices and action, and the need to recommit to act for social justice.

V. REMAINING RESPONSIVE TO YOUTH NEEDS

Even though the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra (ASK) programme across Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh is based on a common value structure, the activities and processes on ground have been moulded as per the geographical and social requirements. For example, the ASK youth process in Mumbai has been implemented in four phases—mobilise the youth, capacity building, advocacy, and campaign building—as the youth had indicated that they wanted to engage stronger on community issues and this step-by-step approach has kept them engaged and motivated.

In districts like Raigad, Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri in the Konkan region, however, the process has been a little different. It was difficult to identify and mobilise the youth here as most have either dropped out of school to engage in agricultural activities or have migrated to cities for work. In these regions, conducting sessions in colleges seemed a good entry-point. After interacting with the youth in their study centres the team expanded outreach to their villages. The initial interaction with the youth had highlighted how demotivated they felt in building successful careers. This became the central focus of the ASK team in this region. From capacitating the college youth, the team has organised career guidance workshops to connect with more youth and help them develop a better future.

In Western Maharashtra too, it has been difficult to mobilise youth. Being among the more developed regions in the State and having diverse populations, Satara, Pune, Kolhapur and Solapur offer better exposure to the youth. Many among them have strong skill sets which the ASK programme aims to further build upon. The ASK processes in this region typically begin with increasing youth outreach, focusing on advocacy and campaign building, with capacity building sessions as needed.

Northern Maharashtra includes large tribal populations, especially in the Nandurbar district. The programme here focuses on helping the youth better understand and access their rights, so that they can avail of government welfare and live with dignity and security.

In Akola and rural Nagpur, the programme has focused on working with youth who are keen to take up agricultural work. Increasing farm productivity, forming Farmer Producer Organisations, understanding Panchayat Raj Institutions and potential ways to interact with local leaders are some engagement approaches taken up in this region.

VI. PROGRAMME COMPONENTS

YOUTH LEADERSHIP BUILDING COURSE (YLBC)

YLBC is a state-level programme focused on youth development and youth for development. The course capacitates youth to address societal questions and challenges, builds knowledge and vision along with campaign-building to establish strong identities in society. The objective of the course is to build five core competencies among the youth:

TAKING THE INITIATIVE FOR CHANGE: The course capacitates youth leaders to handle and take a stand when posed with challenges personally and professionally. Moreover, when faced with such challenges, he or she should initiate steps to change the situation.



CAPACITY TO MOTIVATE SELF AND OTHERS:

The course develops the youth's ability to motivate themselves and their fellow members when faced with difficult situations and encourages them to learn from the situations as well.

EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT TEAM PLAYER:

The course develops the youth to lead and work with teams efficiently in addition to encouraging them to uphold inclusive organisational and team processes.

QUALITY OF NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS: With an aim to develop consistent and strong relationships, the course develops interpersonal skills through its various activities.

CAMPAIGNER OF YOUTH ISSUES: The course pushes the youth to apply various campaign forms to build, articulate and mobilise people to drive social change.

DISTRICT COORDINATOR TRAINING

District Coordinators (DCs) play an integral role in youth development and empowerment under the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra (ASK) programme. They are trained to think deeper about societal issues and are encouraged to have a critical and analytical viewpoint on developments in society. DCs are recruited mostly from among the existing cohort of ASK volunteers. The candidates appear for an interview and after following a recruitment process, they are selected for the DC position. District Coordinators are expected to share six-monthly plans which details their roles and responsibilities and also mentions the goals and targets to be achieved under the ASK training of the youth.



VII. LEARNING FROM CHALLENGES

Engaging with youth towards their long-term development can be challenging, especially as they are under different pressures already. Many live with discrimination daily, others are struck with employment worries. Anubhav Shiksha Kendra (ASK) takes a personalised approach to tackle different challenges, looking at them in context, and working with youth to help them strengthen themselves and further access opportunities.

ASK has faced challenges posed by both state and non-state actors since its inception too. Cuts in funding and shifts in spending priorities to service delivery oriented programmes has meant that the long-term focus that ASK demands has often been overlooked by donors. ASK tackles this challenge by constantly reaching out to more stakeholders, to help them understand the importance of investing in this programme, and focusing on raising local contributions to enable this too.

Within the current socio-political context in India too, principles of plurality and participation have often been attacked. However, instead of letting frustrations stop them, the ASK youth have re-strategised their engagement towards an evidence-based approach which allows them to critique accepted evidence and participate in knowledge-creation processes. This example encapsulates the way ASK has faced challenges—through consistent youth engagement in governance and experiential and reflective mindsets.

VIII.

**YOUTH
PROFILES
IN FOCUS**

IT'S MY TURN TO GIVE BACK TO SOCIETY!

JAYAPAL BHARAT CHAUHAN'S JOURNEY

With the confidence that I have gained from the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra programme, today I feel that I can even handle a crowd of 10,000 people on my own! I am able to comfortably interact with different stakeholders, be it youth from different backgrounds, college principals and teachers, government leaders, and others

ABOUT ME

I am a 26-year-old from a small village named Mandwa in Maharashtra. I am currently pursuing my bachelor's degree in social work. I belong to a poor family, so completing my education has been a struggle. My father passed away when I was 12 years old and all the household responsibilities have been on my shoulders since then. I work at a medical store so I can pay for my brother and my education, as well as cover some of the household expenses. Despite the difficulties on the personal front, I have always been interested in studies, and have never wanted to stop learning.

GETTING ASSOCIATED WITH ANUBHAV SHIKSHA KENDRA

Earlier, I used to be a very quiet person. Even among my friends circle, I did not really speak up. I was acquainted with one of the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra members, and I used to notice how he kept roaming from one village to the other. I asked him what he did, and when he told me about the Youth Leadership Building Course, I was quite excited. Soon after, I joined the programme. This was about 5-6 years ago.

I remember feeling a bit alone at the first session. But soon I made friends, and it became easier to participate more actively in the sessions. The second session was even more memorable. Apart from the discussions, I was also meeting my friends from the programme again. We are still in touch, and often share our experiences and learnings with one another. We were only sharing ideas and thoughts some years ago, but now it is good to see how we have implemented many of those change initiatives in our areas.

The exposure to the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra programme has really improved my interpersonal skills. I have also unleashed my creative skills. I am a part of a street play group of 22 members (13 girls and 9 boys). I also love to write poetry.

FROM A NEW MEMBER TO A SESSION FACILITATOR

In the past few years, I have even led sessions for other youth. I have conducted sessions detailing the ills of casteism, blind faith, alcoholism, and in support of gender equality, and environmental justice. I often host sessions in different colleges, based on the different values of the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra programme, and I try to help setup and strengthen youth collectives. Before hosting any session, I do a detailed background study myself. I contact experts to understand the issues better, and try to contextualise it for the youth of the region where I am going, so that they can derive more value from the conversation. I also focus my energies on mobilising the youth for the session, visiting villages to encourage more youth to join us.

I find the youth who enroll for the programme today have much more exposure. Perhaps it is the mobile phone in their hand, which makes them more connected to the world and more confident. I tell them how, when I joined the programme I was hardly used to speaking with new people and I had never really spoken to girls.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

I am keenly aware of how each one of us can do so much to support one another. I tell people around me, let's

support a person's education. Even if ten of us support one child's education, we will help hundreds continue their studies every year. There is a very bright student living near my house who lost his father when he was young. I didn't want him to drop out of school, so I offered to support his studies. He was quite uncomfortable about it, so I agreed that occasionally he could cook a little extra for me. Today, that student has entered college, and when I think of his achievements my heart fills with pride. Along with some other youth, we have also been trying to set up a library in our village. We have been collecting the resources for some time and in another 2–3 months, we hope to set this up as a functional space.

Through my college fieldwork placement, I have spent up to 6 months at a time in new villages, trying to understand the village, people's livelihoods, governance structures, issues being faced by the people, and have then tried to bring them together to help them devise solutions for the challenges they face. Often, in the initial engagements, people's trust is low. But when they keep seeing me return and be persistent in trying to work with them, they are more forthcoming and we are soon able to forge deeper connections. I also try to help organise small programmes at the local level, to engage with more people, especially the youth. When they come, I tell them—once I used to be like you. I was also sitting there like you and wondering what change could I possibly make. But when you believe in yourself and put in honest efforts, nothing is impossible. I try to engage with the youth further through field visits, meetings and programmes.

INNOVATION IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGES

There are often challenges that I have faced, and I try to think innovatively in these times. Once a few girls from a remote village attended a session I was hosting. The people in their village objected to their leaving the house. Our street play team decided to invest in a long-term intervention to try and shift people's perspectives. For the next 6 months, we hosted a play in the village every 8–10 days, which focused on girls' rights to education, to moving around freely and so on. In the first two months it was very difficult and not many people watched these plays or interacted with us. Simultaneously, we were also recording details of girls from the same village who had left their home to study and for other prospects. We wanted these girls to come together and convince their own community members to let the girls move more freely. As outsiders, we were aware that maybe the people would not take our message to heart. We also started meeting the local leaders in the village. A few weeks later we started free tailoring and beauty courses for the girls in the village. These were the safer options to encourage more girls and women to step outside the house. At the first batch, only three girls enrolled. But we could see the interest growing. More girls would linger near the doors and try to engage occasionally. In the second batch, this number increased to 12 participants. It has been a slow growth, but every life impacted makes a difference.

LEARNING AND CONSTANTLY GIVING BACK!

With the confidence that I have gained from the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra programme, today I feel that I can even handle a crowd of 10,000 people on my own! I am able to comfortably interact with different stakeholders, be it youth from different backgrounds, college principals and teachers, government leaders, and others. We regularly host programmes for the youth and try to get more people to join this programme and spread change. What a journey it has been! Whatever I am today is because of all the learning that the programme has given me access to, and it has instilled a deep love for society in me. I feel that society has done a lot for me and this is my time to return the favour.

Anubhav Shiksha Kendra has helped build my identity in society and I am forever grateful for this. I want to share a few lines in gratitude:

*Soch ko badlo, sitare badal jayenge
Nazar ko badlo, nazare badal jayenge
Kashtiyon ko badalne ki zarurat nahi hai
Dishayein badlo, kinare apne aap badal jayenge*

FROM THINKING OF SOCIAL CHANGE TO ACTIVE INTERVENTIONS!

GAURAV RAMESH PATHE REFLECTS ON HIS JOURNEY

I joined the programme in March 2018. In just a few months, I could see the change in myself, and even my family members and friends noticed how I had become more outgoing. Previously I would only be thinking, now I started acting on my thoughts and beliefs.

ABOUT ME

I grew up in a joint family in Washim, Maharashtra with farming as my family's main source of livelihood. Being an introvert for most of my life, I was never an expressive person, never readily sharing my opinions and views in public. I accepted societal traditions, practices, politics the way it always existed.

I am currently a National Service Scheme (NSS) group leader and a Chhatra Bharati Sangathan leader. I have also been a part of various city-level movements. While I try to complete my B.Com. degree, I am also trying to earn through a catering business.

GETTING ASSOCIATED WITH ANUBHAV SHIKSHA KENDRA

When I learnt of the Youth Leadership Building Course I decided to give it a shot. At that time, I was not comfortable about public speaking. I would be scared to speak on stage, wondering what people would think of me and letting my negative emotions get the better of me. I was also quick to believe what others said.

The programme gave me the confidence to share my views with others and to sharpen my critical thinking abilities. It increased my knowledge about social systems, and helped me better grasp the importance of leadership, communication, confidence, positive thinking and truth. I understood how critical it is to work with people, and the value of getting more people to support change initiatives. The programme also helped me understand step-by-step, how to work towards change and better management practices related to this. We used to be so full of energy,

even with the sessions extending from morning to evening. There was never a dull moment!

LEARNING THROUGH NEW METHODS AND WORKING TOGETHER

What I really liked about the programme was how subjects that were typically not spoken about openly were taken up with honesty by the facilitators. For instance, the session on gender equality was very eye-opening for me. I had never engaged with this subject so deeply. Further, the facilitator's manner of presentation, style of writing and speaking (even injecting moments of light-heartedness in the session), and use of games and other interactive media, made it very easy to follow and remember. I was more enthused to continue with the programme, once I had got a whiff of the sessions.

In the early sessions, I worried about how I would engage with people from different backgrounds and areas. I am from a small village, would I be able to engage with youth from Pune or Mumbai? How would I interact with girls? My fears were soon forgotten. I remember how we stayed up till 4 am on the first day of our session, just engaging on different topics. At one level, I was so comfortable, I almost felt like I was at home. I really enjoyed the self-introduction sessions, and getting to know one another. It will always remain a memorable experience for me.

I joined the programme in March 2018. In just a few months, I could see the change in myself, and even my family members and friends noticed how I had become more outgoing. Previously I would only be thinking, now I started acting on my thoughts and beliefs.

BECOMING A BETTER DOCUMENTER

Throughout each module of the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra programme, we were encouraged to reflect on the day's session and discussion by writing it in our own words. In between the modules, we had to read two books and write our understanding of the subject as well as perspectives. I really enjoyed engaging in this documentation exercise. I feel it has helped me grasp concepts better. It has also helped me become a reporter at my college too, documenting different events that take place. Although my writing may not be perfect, I am satisfied with the way in which documenting my thoughts and learnings has become a habit for me.

BECOMING MORE OUTSPOKEN FOR CHANGE

The rigorous training and exposure through the years has had a great impact on me. Whatever opinions I hold today, I can articulate them effectively on social media. I also conduct training sessions for children and youth about the significance of collective bargaining and effort. The Anubhav Shiksha Kendra programme has taught and encouraged me to analyse situations in my immediate surroundings, learn from them and take those learnings forward and share with others. I would like to thank all the mentors for guiding and motivating us to carry out social work.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES DURING COVID-19

Even with the spread of COVID-19 this year, while there were restrictions, we were able to come together and through student contributions we organised one of the largest blood donation camps in our area. We also distributed ration supplies to 40 families and we organised

a community kitchen that remained functional for 3 months. All of this would not have been possible had I not received the learnings from the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra programme on how to work together and support communities.

The programme gave me the confidence to share my views with others and to sharpen my critical thinking abilities. It increased my knowledge about social systems, and helped me better grasp the importance of leadership, communication, confidence, positive thinking and truth. I understood how critical it is to work with people, and the value of getting more people to support change initiatives.

My dream is to work in a bank and to open an orphanage. I am committed to doing more for social development, and I hope I can keep taking ahead efforts for change with people.

DRIVING CHANGE AND EMPOWERMENT COLLECTIVELY!

ANSARI SHAHENS SHAH MASROOR SHARES HIS STORY

My only message to young people is that if you care for and want to contribute to the nation, then you must try to bring changes yourself. You must try to find out what is happening around you, what are the small steps that can lead to an understanding of good from bad and eventually to a process of change.

ABOUT ME

I was born in a village in Nawada, Bihar. Since my childhood I have been very interested in learning. By the time I was seven, I had finished reading the Quran. My grandfather really encouraged my parents to let me study, seeing my interest and that's how I ended up in Ambojwadi, an informal settlement in Malvani, Malad West, to live with my relatives and continue my studies. I was only 10-years-old then, and felt sad to leave behind my family. But I agreed, knowing that this decision may afford me a better future. I completed my schooling in Malvani and my higher secondary education at an aided college in Goregaon. Till the eighth grade, I won lots of awards for my studies. After that, I also became interested in sports so my grades dipped a little, but I managed to do well overall.

GETTING ASSOCIATED WITH ANUBHAV SHIKSHA KENDRA

Till a certain point of time, my life consisted of just going to school and returning home to help with some household chores and a family-based small business. When I was in the tenth standard, my friends suggested I go for the one-day camp Khelenge Badlunge that was being organised by Anubhav Shiksha Kendra in May 2016. I decided to go just for fun. The camp and the activities changed my way of thinking. I learned about the power of unity and teamwork, and how we can win every game of life with it, be it personal or professional. I realised that there is a lot to learn and contribute to, beyond just attending college and coming home.

Once the imperative of the betterment of our community as well as society dawned on me, I enrolled myself in Anubhav Shiksha Kendra. I also started to participate in meetings and different activities of the local youth collective, Malvani Yuva Parishad. It is a youth group in which youth like me learn through exposure visits and workshops about constitutional rights, gender equality, environmental justice and democracy. The youth group had recently been set up, and I felt it was a good avenue for me to contribute. I started supporting their street plays and other activities. Over time, all these engagements really opened up my mind and changed my way of seeing everything happening around me.

REALISING THE POWER OF COLLECTIVES

I was particularly fascinated by the concept of collective building. I had earlier been a part of community-based groups for Muslim boys. We observed our festivals together, and organised service for society. I realised that the Malvani Yuva Parishad offered a larger platform to engage with youth and the community, and try to better the social fabric. It would help me further action on social development. As a starting point, we focused on making the youth group at our area, Moinia Masjid, stronger. The youth were able to claim a disused community space for play and over the next six months we enjoyed using this space for physical development and expression. Unfortunately, due to vested interests of other parties, we were unable to use the space for long, but we learnt early lessons through this community engagement.

The Anubhav Shiksha Kendra process also introduced me to other youth collectives. I found it very inspiring to listen to the experiences of other youth leaders. The programme's structure of *sathi*, *mitra* and *sahayogi* is also quite unique I feel, helping youth better contribute and learn from their own journey and milestones.

PARTICIPATING IN CAMPAIGNS FOR CHANGE

I also participated in a campaign called School Chalo Abhiyan, wherein we enrolled in school a number of students, including dropouts and those who lacked the required documents. What motivated me the most in this intervention was that we also tried very hard to enrol those children who were involved in rag picking and substance abuse. We spoke to their parents, convinced them and enrolled their children in schools. I also participated in awareness campaigns by the Malvani Yuva Parishad on different issues such as domestic violence, gender equality and road safety.

Today I am one of the leaders who steer the youth collective Malvani Yuva Parishad. The learnings from Anubhav Shiksha Kendra have also given me the strength to stand with people affected by the Covid-19 induced pandemic. During the lockdown, our youth collective made great efforts to help the people who were adversely hit by the pandemic.

TAKING FORWARD THE WORK ON COLLECTIVE BUILDING

Since September 2020, I have also started working at the non-profit Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA). I have been working to help set up youth collectives in Bandra. Strategically, we began spoken English classes to engage the youth and encourage them to step outside their homes. We knew that if we called them for meetings and discussions, no one would come. Along with the skill-based session, we spend some time engaging on social issues with the youth. In a short time, 10 youth have risen as committed members, among the 15-18 who attended the classes on average. In the early days, getting every youth member to join us was challenging, but it has been an equally learning process.

JOIN AND LEAD CHANGE EFFORTS!

Anubhav Shiksha Kendra is a process, not a platform. My only message to young people is that if you care for and want to contribute to the nation, then you must try to bring changes yourself. You must try to find out what is happening around you, what are the small steps that can lead to an understanding of good from bad and eventually to a process of change. Through my own engagements with this programme, I realise how I kept thinking of people and society in a broader sense. This has been reflected in how our efforts have led to many community members being able to access government entitlements, such as ration cards.

The learnings from Anubhav Shiksha Kendra have also given me the strength to stand with people affected by the Covid-19 induced pandemic. During the lockdown, our youth collective made many efforts to help the people who were adversely hit by the pandemic.

At one time, my family members were unsure whether I should devote more time to this or focus more on my studies. But they are proud today when they see how I am actively working for change.

THE COMMITMENT TO FURTHER EDUCATION AND LEARNING!

KIRAN DATTATRAY MALI SHARES HIS JOURNEY

As the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra process puts forth, determination and persistence is important for success. For almost 10 years, none of the students from our school had earned a rank in the State scholarship. I was determined to ensure that at least one student from my class achieves a rank. I taught my class regularly, without taking a day off. I came to school even on weekends and I am happy to share that one my students earned the district level rank.

ABOUT ME

A teacher at Price Shivaji Vidyamandir, Jadhavwadi, Kolhapur, I have been a part of Anubhav Shiksha Kendra for the past four years. I live with my family of five members which includes my wife, my daughter and my parents. I have always been interested in social work and I used to engage myself in various small scale events and campaigns as and when I could.

GETTING ASSOCIATED WITH ANUBHAV SHIKSHA KENDRA

When I started teaching at a government school in 2009, I realised that setting up a library would be beneficial for not just students but teachers and all the village community members. I put in the initial investment and began setting up the library. In 2013, I met Shivaji Mali who happened to be a relative. He explained his work to me as part of the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra process and my interest to engage in social work pushed me to support and learn from his work.

THE COMMITMENT TO LEARNING AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

With the library set up, I realised that the people in my village were not inclined towards reading. Thus, hardly anyone ever visited the library. This is when I started planning activities at the library to get more people to visit the library and actually make use of the resources that were available. Sessions on topics such as career guidance received an excellent response and I began planning more such sessions to train and guide youth and children to plan for successful futures.

I started approaching people from my village who ended up as successful doctors, engineers. I requested them to conduct lectures for my students at the library. Additionally, I identified the need for better access to information on MPSC exams in my village. Being an MPSC aspirant in 2015 myself, I knew first hand that students in my village had limited information about the exam that considerably decreased their chances of cracking it. I felt that even if I was not able to clear the exam, the youth in my villages should be given a fair chance. I approached government officials in our village who had cleared the exam and asked them to take sessions at the library as well. Thus began a series of successful engagements with youth and children at my school.

With my thorough training under the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra programme, I was able to re-structure and modify workings at the school and due to hard-working colleagues, cooperation from students and parents, the municipal school was among the first ones to get ISO certified in Maharashtra.

BRINGING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TO MY ROLE AS A TEACHER

I have found great value in the programme's 'experiential learning' focus. It has moulded my personality, instilling values and awareness that contribute to my overall growth. When I began teaching, I did not know much about this skill. There was this largely accepted model of how a teacher should be. I looked at the role of a teacher similar to that of a police, someone whom the children should be scared of. I used to punish children and speak harshly to them. But this behaviour with students did not do much to

increase their learning. Thus, I began thinking out of the box, picked up learnings from Anubhav Shiksha Kendra and its various programmes. I used the experiential learning model in my classroom, and I saw positive results.

Anubhav Shiksha Kendra also taught me the concept of 'natural laws' and I was sure to bring that to my school. Several teachers and children planted 60 trees in an activity organised by the school. I am also the Manager of Bhai Madhavrao Bagal Public Libraries in Yelgud and through this library, I aim to inculcate the values of ASK in the youth and students in the area through conducting meetings and sessions regularly.

All of this has definitely been challenging but Anubhav Shiksha Kendra processes were a huge encouragement which motivated me to keep going. Our school used to lie vacant during the evenings and being a government school, the building had no security which resulted in it attracting anti-social behaviour during the evenings. We sprung to action and approached the group that occupied the school premises in the evening. We even approached a nearby hotel owner for help. He was aware of the good work and the benefits the library was doing to the people. With such goodwill, we received CCTV cameras for the school which has helped secure the school premises.

As the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra process puts forth, determination and persistence is important for success. For almost 10 years, none of the students from our school had earned a rank in the State scholarship. I was determined to ensure that at least one student from my class achieves a rank. I taught my class regularly, without taking a day off. I

came to school even on weekends and I am happy to share that one my students earned the district level rank.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I was determined to help the needy and poor families with dry ration and other essential items in the village of Yelgud and my fellow members at Anubhav Shiksha Kendra have been a huge support in this regard. We even helped the police who tirelessly patrolled the entry and exit gates of the village.

Being a teacher myself, I have seen how children's education has suffered. Till date, some students struggle to cope with the syllabus. Everyday I try to reach more students digitally and I am happy to share that 80% of my class uses the Zoom application and we regularly conduct our classes online. I have also created a Whatsapp group for us to share homework, homework solutions and queries.

I have found great value in the programme's 'experiential learning' focus. It has moulded my personality, instilling values and awareness that contribute to my overall growth.

Whatever the situation, I want to ensure that education and learning goes on uninterrupted.

CLAIMING MY SPACE!

SHAILA YADAV REFLECTS ON HER JOURNEY

Anubhav Shiksha Kendra exposed me to the important role that youth play in society. It made me aware of challenges faced by not just nomadic tribes and minorities but by youth in general. I realised many facets of empowerment interventions which I apply and pass on to other people till date. I realised that the youth have immense potential and if not tapped effectively, they can get involved in anti-social activities. Thus, being aware of societal happenings, current affairs and most importantly, being vocal about your opinions is important.

ABOUT ME

I belong to the Kolhati Dombari, a Scheduled Caste (ST) community and I live in Aundh village in Satara district. I spent my early childhood singing in events (singing in *tamasha* and *jagran* was a traditional livelihood option for the community). My family survived by selling needles and other small plastic household items.

Education was never an option for the children of my community, but I was determined to break stereotypes and become well-educated. I was determined to increase the visibility of issues and challenges faced by nomadic tribes and ensure that we received the same place in society like the others.

Surpassing all challenges, I began my education and even though I failed a subject in tenth and twelfth grade, I continued to study as I knew that education alone could help me tackle the discrimination and neglect of society. To support my studies, I continued to sing in events. I even moved out of my village and began to pursue a Masters in Social Work degree. After earning my degree, I began to work and engage myself in social campaigns and started working closely with nomadic tribes across the state.

GETTING ASSOCIATED WITH ANUBHAV SHIKSHA KENDRA

I specifically worked with women as I had faced the vulnerabilities myself. I focused my work on empowering them by creating their groups, conducting awareness sessions, working on questions of citizenship and so on. This is when I learnt of the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra

process through a friend. I attended the Bhatke Vimukt Yuva Parishad workshop which was being held for students belonging to the Scheduled Caste and aimed at increasing their awareness of their rights and role in society.

My learnings from the workshop were immense and it encouraged me to engage deeper with the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra programme. Being actively involved in social work, I had mostly worked with women. Anubhav Shiksha Kendra exposed me to the important role that youth play in society. It made me aware of challenges faced by not just nomadic and minorities but by youth in general. I realised many facets of empowerment interventions which I apply and pass on to other people till date. I realised that the youth have immense potential and if not tapped effectively, they can get involved in anti-social activities. Thus, being aware of societal happenings, current affairs and most importantly, being vocal about your opinions is important.

I realised that the youth require a platform to place their demands forward and developing such safe platforms are important. Thus, with my friend and support from Anubhav Shiksha Kendra and the non-profit Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA), I went on to set up the Bhatke Vimukt Yuva Parishad movement in Western Maharashtra and helped strengthen campaigns to amplify the learnings and mobilise youth to demand for their rights.

MY JOURNEY TOWARDS POLITICAL CHANGE

When I joined the Youth Leadership Building Course (YLBC) by Anubhav Shiksha Kendra, my learnings only increased. I had so far learnt of the role of youth in

society but taking it further and understanding their contribution through political means was an eye-opener. The programme taught me the basics of the political system, how I could stand for elections and put my views forward, the documents that I would require to do so and the qualifications that I might need to have.

My major takeaway was the importance of constitutional values and its relevance in our current lives. I had never read and studied our Constitution so closely. The programme really helped me understand it deeply.

When I decided to run for the Sarpanch elections in March 2019 in my village Aundh, I faced multiple hurdles. Somebody from a minority community standing for elections and to be a woman to do so, my weaknesses were high. My village also has some influential people who handed out election tickets to candidates. I realised that I would not stand a chance and would not be given a ticket. Thus, I stood for elections independently.

Even though I did not win the elections, I brought my community on the map of the village. My community has received visibility, we are being considered as citizens today. I am happy to share that my opposition candidate till date considers me a strong candidate and I have received some support from people I thought would never support a girl like me. The elections also helped people see my potential and I could successfully build a strong personal network that is beneficial in my social work and campaigns.

CONTINUING EFFORTS FOR CHANGE

Today, I teach children from Scheduled Caste families and also work with youth to mobilise and guide them on matters of politics, and societal affairs. I base all my work with children and youth on the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra values. I apply my understanding of constitutional values that I gained from the ASK process. While conducting dialogues with the youth on political affairs, I keep going back to the Youth Leadership Building Course frameworks to guide me. I am thankful for the detailed module of the programme which has clearly impacted my current work and enriched it at every stage.

I am what I am because of Anubhav Shiksha Kendra today and I am grateful for the journey it gave me. I plan to continue working with children and youth to do my bit in developing responsible and well-aware citizens in the country. I also plan to run for elections next time again.

My major takeaway was the importance of constitutional values and its relevance in our current lives. I had never read and studied our Constitution so closely. The programme really helped me understand it deeply.

Processes like Anubhav Shiksha Kendra encourage people like me to continue rising, raising our voices and aiming to bring change in society that benefits all.

MY STORY OF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

KOYAL KARTIK MESHAM LOOKS BACK ON HER JOURNEY

Anubhav Shiksha Kendra has helped me build informed views and opinions about various aspects in society, to have a perception to look at things. More importantly, it has given me a space to build my opinion, free from the influence of anyone. Thus, the confidence I project today is mine alone but it definitely trails back to the various capacity building workshops by Anubhav Shiksha Kendra.

ABOUT ME

I was born in a small village in Bhandara which falls in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. I have completed my MSc in Botany. I have had an inclination towards social work from a very young age, and I am happy that I have been able to pursue it till date. My father was involved in the Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) rural work in Bhandara and was active in working for the betterment of our village. His experience and work was my first exposure to social work. My first exposure to the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra (ASK) process was post my 12th grade examinations. I met with Mrunali Tai, a woman who introduced me to the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra process, explained to me how it worked and shared her experience of being in the process.

GETTING ASSOCIATED WITH ANUBHAV SHIKSHA KENDRA

I was drawn to the unique structure and design of the programme - how it had no selection process, was not restricted to people having a certain educational background and it accepted anyone who was willing to contribute to drive social change. My father saw the features of this engagement driven programme and encouraged me to participate.

The first training I attended was at the Akola Agricultural University where youth from different areas of Maharashtra participated. It gave me immense exposure and I learnt how to converse with people from across genders and areas across the State. As I grew in the process, I learnt more and more about the programme, about myself, about society. There exists programmes

that youth can participate in, like the National Service Scheme (NSS) but it is restricted to college students. The Anubhav Shiksha Kendra programme is like no other. It is independent of any institution and is not restricted to a certain discipline.

I began to compare my knowledge in Botany to the education I was receiving by being a part of Anubhav Shiksha Kendra. While my Botany degree gave me in-depth knowledge of a specific field, Anubhav Shiksha Kendra gave me a multi-lens perspective to look at society. Right from gender, youth roles, constitutional values, personality traits, politics, social structures and movements, the programme touched upon all aspects of society.

Like people say, 'Duniya dekhne se hi tum sikhte ho', I believe that the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra, through its various trainings across various geographies in the state, has helped me enrich my learnings. The Youth Leadership Building Course (YLBC) pushed me to ask difficult questions such as, Who Am I? Who are the youth? What is their role in society? This gave me clarity and purpose to make decisions in my life on my own terms. Belonging to a small village, I was never comfortable talking about menstrual cycles, questioning gender roles, but the programme encouraged me to speak out. In sessions about Friendships, Attraction and Love, I began to question aspects of my life that I never thought I would. Anubhav Shiksha Kendra truly provided a comfortable and safe space for us youth to talk and share as nobody was awkward or uncomfortable when questions like these were asked.

CONFRONTING GENDER STEREOTYPES

Being one among five sisters, people in my village always saw my parents with sympathetic eyes, saying five girls would be such a burden on the family. But because of Anubhav Shiksha Kendra, I have been able to prove them wrong. I have travelled alone to Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur for trainings knowing very well that people would remark that how can a girl travel all that distance alone! But I have become confident, responsible and strong enough to take care of myself. Today, I even take girls along with me to trainings across regions in the State by convincing their parents and letting them know very clearly the benefits of the training.

Back in my village, I am also involved in forming youth collectives at the village, taluka and district level. By involving them in the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra process, we encourage them to speak their mind freely and share experiences. People in the village were skeptical about us first, seeing that boys and girls were interacting so freely made them uncomfortable. But they have now come to accept our work. Seeing the banner of Anubhav Shiksha Kendra and the values written on it, people understand that we are working towards something genuine and are determined to bring change for the betterment of all.

FROM PERSONAL TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Anubhav Shiksha Kendra believes in bringing about change from the very roots, changing mindsets to ensure that change is sustained. Anubhav Shiksha Kendra has helped me build informed views and opinions about various aspects in society, to have a perception to look at things. More importantly, it has given me a space to build my

opinion, free from the influence of anyone. Thus, the confidence I project today is mine alone but it definitely trails back to the various capacity building workshops by Anubhav Shiksha Kendra. From being someone who was not comfortable making eye-contact with people, today, I have grown more comfortable with people and do not shy away from putting my point of view forward.

I have been a part of Anubhav Shiksha Kendra for the past 6-7 years now. All these years I have accumulated a lot of learnings and I continue to do that everyday. My happiness knew no bounds when I got an opportunity to work as a District Coordinator for the programme. I felt it was the perfect chance to share my learnings with other youth members and be a part of their social change journey.

The Youth Leadership Building Course (YLBC) pushed me to ask difficult questions such as, Who Am I? Who are the youth? What is their role in society? This gave me clarity and purpose to make decisions in my life on my own terms.

I feel education is definitely important but that's not sufficient. An experiential learning programme like Anubhav Shiksha Kendra holds a lot of value as it builds on the education you gain, and you can see the personal growth it results in.

IX. OFFERING SUPPORT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc, leaving millions without any income and resources overnight. The youth took the lead by quickly organising various relief activities. They approached people, including tribal communities, to spread awareness about the pandemic and the precautionary measures that people could adopt.

In Nashik city and Malegaon in Maharashtra, The ASK team also supported around 8,000+ people with snacks and meals (two times a day) and provided dry ration to 6,156 families. They provided over 2,000 packets of sanitary napkins, 7,431 cloth masks and over 100 families were given hygiene kits.

More than 45,000 migrant workers were supported with food and travel arrangements to make it easier for them to make the journey home amidst the pandemic. Women were provided with sanitary napkins and other required medicines and those travelling with young children were given ORS sachets.

Other initiatives by the youth include organising blood donation camps, yoga classes to promote mental and physical well-being, counselling and yoga sessions conducted in migrant workers' shelter.

26 online study circles took place for the youth to discuss the challenges they were facing due to the pandemic.

The ASK youth members also supported government agencies during the COVID times. They helped the police in Nashik and members of the Dakshata Samiti in Kolhapur (a group of Gram Panchayats in-charge of safeguarding interests of villagers during the pandemic) with patrolling the area.

In tribal areas such as Nandurbar and Nashik, the youth conducted awareness sessions on cleanliness and sanitation with children and women. They also initiated sanitisation drives in the area.

Precautionary messages were announced over loudspeakers in Nandurbar, Nashik and Dhule to spread awareness and remind people to take safety measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 infection.

X. THE COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

Anubhav Shiksha Kendra showcases its open-minded and determined approach to engage with youth and empower them to lead change. The programme pushes traditional boundaries and addresses inequalities in uniquely youth-driven and -centric ways. It offers many youth their first and foundational access to leadership and participation in society for a better future. Youth interest is challenging to maintain, so youth workers constantly focus on increasing engagement via interactive activities and awareness programmes in rural areas, especially towards women, given the disproportionate ratio of women to men in their events. When young people emerge as confident, informed citizens through the programme, inspiring others to join them and strengthen the voice for change, the objectives of ASK are realised.

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ABOUT YUVA

Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) is a non-profit development organisation committed to enabling vulnerable groups to access their rights. YUVA encourages the formation of people's collectives that engage in the discourse on development, thereby ensuring self-determined and sustained collective action in communities. This work is complemented with advocacy and policy recommendations. Founded in Mumbai in 1984, currently YUVA operates in the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Assam and New Delhi.

At the community-level, through an integrated 360-degree approach, YUVA delivers solutions on issues of housing, livelihood, environment and governance. Through research, YUVA creates knowledge that enhances capacity building. Through partnerships in campaigns, YUVA provides solidarity and builds strong alliances to drive change.

