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# EXPLORING EDUCATION'S ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE URBANISATION

through PUKAR's Youth Fellowship Program

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**Image credits**

Cover image from PUKAR

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## ABSTRACT

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This research explores the potential of the Youth Fellowship Program (YFP) as a supplementary urban educational intervention to formal higher education. The findings highlight the significance of the YFP as a crucial element in enabling research-oriented, problem-focused and action-oriented urban education. Such an approach complements formal urban higher education and addresses existing gaps, making contemporary urban education more responsive to the challenges faced in urban settings.

Firstly, the programme recognises critical gaps in the contemporary higher education curriculum, ensuring that essential dimensions of Indian urbanisation, including vulnerability, inequality, access to basic services, urban poverty and informal employment, receive due recognition. Secondly, the YFP acts as a bridge between formal and informal education systems, establishing strong feedback loops within the learning ecosystem and facilitating the integration of practical knowledge into formal higher education. This bridge strengthens the overall learning process and enhances the relevance of educational content to real-world challenges. Thirdly, the YFP places human agency at the core of its transformative agenda. By prioritising core constitutional principles in education and providing space for vulnerable and marginalised youth to become YFP fellows, the programme aligns with representation issues, ensuring inclusivity and fostering empowerment among the learners. Fourthly, the YFP structurally demonstrates its effectiveness in addressing multiple interdependencies inherent in various urban development agendas. Unlike discipline and skill-focused higher education systems in India, the programme enables a holistic approach where YFP can engage with challenges in areas like healthcare and navigate a suite of interconnected development issues. Finally, the research emphasises the YFP's participatory processes of learning as an iterative and dynamic approach. Such participatory learning fosters an empowering environment and emphasises learning as a continual journey rather than a mere end point. By equalising power dynamics and legitimising local knowledge creation, participatory processes promote human agency and create a positive ecosystem for public action, ultimately fostering personal and context-driven transformations.

This research advocates for the adoption and expansion of the YFP as a complementary process in formal higher education. The YFP's emphasis on addressing urban challenges, fostering participatory learning and promoting human agency offers a unique perspective on urban education's form and structure. The YFP stands as an important model for reimagining urban education and making it more responsive to the dynamic needs of the urban.



## INTRODUCTION

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India is witnessing dramatic rates of urbanisation which could offer “one of the largest opportunities for sustainable urbanisation in the world” (Batra et al., 2021). The task of seizing these opportunities is difficult given the challenges posed by the urban, such as complex and unique variations, rapid rate of change and continuities of historical, structural and social inequalities. In addition, while there is “a huge industry to train urban professionals (engineers, architects, planners, municipal finance, public administration, public and environmental health), ... none of the courses offer the overarching approach that achieving SDG 11 demands” (Bazaz & Parnell, 2021, p. 8). What is the “overarching approach” needed to urbanise sustainably? Do educational processes offer potential pathways to do so? In theory, education has the potential to increase learners’ agency and capacities and nurture relationships among learners, all of which have the power to contribute towards the goal of sustainable cities. Yet, scholars of education and the urban have commonly not worked together despite the importance each domain holds for the other. This has led scholars to call for the cultivation of a reciprocal relationship between education and the urban (Bazaz & Parnell, 2021).

What role should higher education institutions play in the context of the city? Apart from nurturing and building human capital necessary for participation in the economic process, higher education institutions are sites that need to engage with challenges in the local context. Such institutions, through existing educational programmes, need to build critical capacities amongst learners that are aligned to the sustainability agenda. In addition, such higher education spaces are also sites that nurture innovative solutions, but the key is twofold: firstly, higher education institutions should be able to build capacities amongst learners in the context of problem diagnosis; and secondly, higher education institutions should, through curriculum and learning processes, be able to mainstream issues of vulnerability and justice into technocratic discourses and thereby, give equal prominence to constitutional values.

What could this reciprocal relationship between education and the urban look like? In practice, institutional learning structures have been left wanting, with some scholars identifying the ways in which they have instead reproduced inequalities and driven unsustainability (Batra et al., 2021, p. 15). Formal schooling and higher education systems are marked by multiple divides: between academic disciplines, between theory and practice, between experiential knowledge and “recognised” knowledge, between individuals to drive competition, between social groups and more. Collaborative, creative and hands-on work is rare despite being essential to pave a possible path forward. There is an urgent need to look for experimental educational initiatives that seek to address the weak link between education and sustainable urbanisation. Initiatives such as massive open online courses (MOOCs) or capacity building programmes have sought to address this gap by equipping and updating practitioners with essential skills and knowledge, which allows for building capacities to be able to intervene in the urban context. These initiatives are, however, built on certain normative notions of knowledge and evidence, are not necessarily aligned to a specific context, do not build on the agency to problematise and are not necessarily experiential and action-oriented. While these initiatives provide a step-up from the conventional, discipline-oriented urban education, they are not sufficient.

The idea of sustainable urbanisation has not percolated solidly through the higher education system because of discipline-dominated rigid institutional structures. Sustainable urbanisation, by definition, includes equal importance to issues of social, economic and environmental development. These issues are highly interdependent in an urban context, but higher education structures are, unfortunately, aligned to one such dimension and precludes the highly connected nature of the urban context. For instance, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 is intricately linked to other goals such as good health, peace and justice, and decent work and economic growth, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The connections between SDG 11 and other SDGs



Source: United Nations Habitat, 2018

Cities on the other hand, like education, entice citizens with the promise of opportunities for growth, social mobility, freedom, innovation and progress. Cities, in India and the global South particularly, have fallen short of their promise for four primary reasons. First, spaces for learning, such as higher education institutions, which are vital for growth, progress and social mobility, are largely inaccessible for students from marginalised backgrounds. If they do enrol in these institutions, their identities and knowledge are rarely affirmed and their vulnerabilities are often exacerbated. The learning template fails to recognise the social, gendered and religion-based backgrounds of such participants and delegitimises knowledges acquired through lived experiences. These are in addition to structural practises of exclusion, either through an inability to follow class discussions and lack of a support mechanisms or difficulties in adjusting to an urban-centric educational experience. Second, instead of equipping learners with the

knowledge and skills needed to respond to the realities of how cities are changing, the pedagogy of institutions has stagnated. To worsen matters, these systems “have continued to build on the view that employability and economic growth are the chief aims ... relegating the Constitutional values of equality, justice and fraternity and hence, active citizenship to the sidelines” (Batra et al., 2021). Third and relatedly, Indian cities offer unequal opportunities for knowledge production and “action” is rarely taken based on evidence to practically address inequities. Those who inhabit the city’s margins seldom have a say in how it is planned and represented in the public imagination. Fourth, Indian cities also lack pathways to forge and sustain relationships among residents across religion, gender, sexuality, caste, class and disability.

An educational programme run by PUKAR, a Mumbai-based NGO, called the Youth Fellowship (YF) has responded to these four concerns by bringing together those who reflect the socio-economic background of the city, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds who contribute significantly to running the city, to learn collectively, conduct research, claim their position in their locality/city and address inequalities. The research component is vital to the programme, enabling it to prioritise the learning process rather than being skill oriented. This research assesses the usefulness of such an educational intervention as a supplementary process to the formal higher education system, particularly in the context of the urban. This study also assesses the YFP in the context of “democratising” research and thereby making it accessible to all, particularly the marginalised youth, and whether the YFP adequately equips learners with the agency to respond in a meaningful way to participate in the city building agenda. This is imagined to be via knowledge production and nurturing relationships across gender, caste, religion, class and sexuality. The key overarching question of our research is to examine the YFP’s ability to respond to the sustainable urbanisation question.

The YFP was not conceived and is not being studied as a model that should potentially replace the formal higher education system. Rather, this research views the YFP as a supplementary model of education that can offer potentially important insights in the context of urban education, sustainable urbanisation and urban-centric learning. Noting the criticisms by education scholars that the contemporary education system reproduces dominant social norms and existing inequalities, conversations about what the mainstream education system should look like must take place but lay outside the direct scope of this research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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Educational institutions have been unable to respond to the demands of sustainable urbanisation (Bazaz & Parnell, 2021). The urban is plagued with “wicked problems” that Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber believe cannot be addressed through scientific expertise alone, given the “inherently political and conflictual dimensions of how enduring problems are defined and scoped” (Head, 2019, p. 182). The urban is marked by interconnected problems where

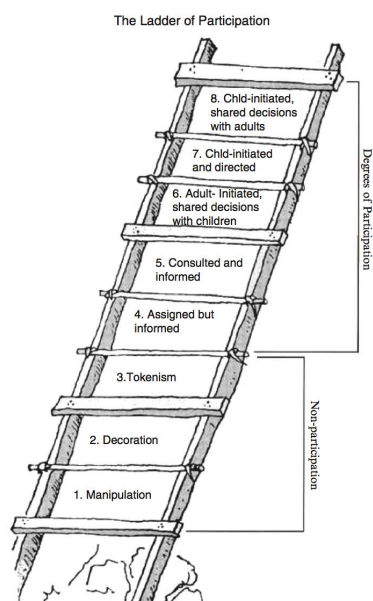
Every problem interacts with other problems and is therefore part of a system of interrelated problems, a system of problems ... a mess ... The solution to a mess can seldom be obtained by independently solving each of the problems of which it is composed ... Efforts to deal separately with such aspects of urban life as transportation, health, crime, and education seem to aggravate the total situation. (Ackoff, 1974, p. 21)

Urban problems are deeply entangled, and responses must deal with these entanglements in contrast to the atomised approach offered by schools and higher education. It is essential in the context of urban education that "shared meaning" about problems and possible solutions are cultivated and such an educational process should stand in contrast to the deep divisions and individual-centric focus on traditional education. In the context of the urban,

You don't so much 'solve' a wicked problem as you help stakeholders negotiate shared understanding and shared meaning about the problem and its possible solutions. The objective of the work is coherent action, not final solution. (Conklin, 2006, p. 5)

To negotiate and cultivate shared meaning, participation from residents whose views are not given importance by the privileged decision-makers is vital. For PUKAR's co-founder Arjun Appadurai, the organisation aimed to offer space "in which English speakers—younger English speakers of college age, and their counterparts who are more comfortable in such languages as Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati among others, can enter a common dialogue about the city, themselves, and the future" (Appadurai, 2006). Implicit in Appadurai's statement about entering "a common dialogue" is a desire to "equalise" hierarchies that deny marginalised residents from participating in several matters related to the urban (for example, based on the language they are speaking, that is inevitably linked to caste, gender and class). Participatory processes, thus, become the key axis of learning as the processes, by design, equalise hierarchies and attempt to create dialogic scaffolding.

Figure 2: Roger Hart's ladder of children's participation separates between "non-participation" and "degrees of participation"



Source: Hart, 1992



Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like PUKAR are increasingly attracted to and are promising to use participatory approaches (that rely on a commitment to “equalise” power). However, given the challenges that come with implementing participatory processes, we must raise questions about the nature and degree of participation that has been facilitated. Here, Roger Hart’s “ladder of children’s participation” influenced by Sherry Arnstein’s “ladder of citizen participation” offers a useful framework (see Figure 2). In the YFP context, we would replace mentions of “child” or “children” with “fellows” and replace “adult” with “facilitator” or “duty bearer.” The ladder helps us define participation and understand where/how it is taking place (or not). Participatory processes take place when traditional power hierarchies between and among institutions, teachers and students are challenged through practical efforts to “equalise” and “share” power. These processes can also empower and increase the agency of learners. Agency is defined as “the ability to identify valued goals and desired outcomes, and to pursue those goals and outcomes proactively, purposefully and effectively” (Howley-Rouse, 2020). Educational processes that encourage reflection help learners to identify and probe their goals. Problem-solving/exploring and project-based learning offer “opportunities for students to develop agency by making sense of a problem at the edge of their current understanding or skill level” (Howley-Rouse, 2020). The YFP aims to practice participatory pedagogy, reflection and problem-solving to increase learners’ agency.

In the global North, educators have written reflective accounts of teaching courses on action-based research and participatory action research (Calderón, 2004; Cornett, 1990; Smedley-López et al., 2017; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Critical research methodology tools have also been taught during after-school programmes in the global North, and insights from these are also useful (Burke & Hadley, 2018). These insightful accounts reveal strategies that can effectively teach critical approaches within traditional university or schooling settings. Other scholars have focused on applying “decolonial,” critical, participatory or community-engaged research (Manzo, 2020; Schensul, 2006). In a book chapter titled “Liberation Psychology: Theory, Method, Practice, and Social Justice” the authors discuss how an arts-based method can be used to develop collaborations with the goal of “elevating contributions to knowledge production offered by those most oppressed or excluded by society” (Comas-Díaz, 2020). In another book chapter titled “Youth Participatory Action Research as Critical Pedagogy,” the authors examine a programme where youth are trained as participatory action researchers (Duncan-Andrade, 2008). They detail how professors at the University of California, Los Angeles started a summer seminar that brought together “students, teachers, and parents from urban schools and communities to design and carry out [group-based] critical participatory action research projects about issues of immediate concern to these schools and communities” (Duncan-Andrade, 2008, p. 112). The chapter illustrated how a course changed over time and in response to the urbanisation of Los Angeles.

In a separate article, Scott et al. (2015) examine if training in youth participatory action research can be used to develop “college-ready research skills and critical consciousness with youth in a college access program” for students with “financial need and/or no family history of college” (p. 142). Adriana Allen et al. (2022) reflect on an assemblage of interventions in schools spread across Latin America to ask, “How do participants learn to become agents of change for a socially just habitat?” (p. 447). These interventions share similarities with the YFP interest in “popular urbanism” and Paulo Freire’s pedagogy. However, Allen et al.’s research lacked a critical lens on the limitations of the reviewed interventions.

Literature also points to a divide between people's campaigns and social movements—which are seen as doing “transformative and radical work”—and NGOs, which are seen as “depoliticizing, conformist, and even statist agents” (Bornstein & Sharma, 2015; Fisher, 1997; Jenkins, 2010; Kamat, 2002; Kothari, 1986).

Substantial scholarship, as reviewed above, exists at the interface of the formal school and education system, “wicked problems” such as the “urban”, and how variations of CBPAR (community-based participatory action research) and adjacent critical research practices are taught and practised. However, there are several gaps in the scholarship. First, most of the published research has taken place in institutional and related settings in the global North. Second, most of the scholarship consists of reflective and intervention-focused first-person accounts by educators/researchers rather being an evaluation of a sustained educational intervention.

In summary, a rapid literature review in the context of locating the broad objectives of the YFP provides some intellectual scaffolding. Firstly, there is the agenda of the “wicked problem” that needs attention and the contemporary education system has failed in this. Secondly, equalising power amongst learner participants via pedagogy and learning processes and cultivating a shared goal is the key response axis to the “wicked problem” agenda. Thirdly, education-centric evidence in the context of sites that are host to rapid and dynamic development processes is lacking and it is not evident whether any such existing processes are meaningful. It is in this context that the evaluation of PUKAR's YFP becomes critical as it may provide concrete evidence for education-centric transformation agenda.

## INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATION OF THE YOUTH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

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In the early 2000s, Rahul Srivastava, a lecturer of sociology at Wilson College, Mumbai, was worried about how students increasingly viewed an educational degree as a stepping stone to becoming employable.

The content really did not matter. When I once caught a boy taking a nap in class and discovered that he worked till about two a.m. every night at a restaurant, I decided once and for all to change gears. It was important to respond to my context more directly. (Srivastava, 2005)

Why was the sociology programme disconnected from urban realities despite ostensibly being a discipline concerned with understanding societies?

The only way I could continue to sustain an interest in my discipline and connect with them was by devising a relevant study programme *outside the syllabus* [emphasis added]. This took shape in the form of the Wilson Neighborhood Project. Its basic idea was to encourage students to write ethnographic and historical accounts of their localities by using their families as starting points. (Srivastava, 2005)

Srivastava's decision to look "outside the syllabus" points to the rigidities of working within the institutional structure of the university system. The emphasis on understanding and reflecting on one's lived realities and history was vital for an effective learning process. The context was given paramount importance and operationalised through a focus on families and localities as "starting points." Places, then, were viewed as sites of learning.

Srivastava, along with several others, spent time developing a methodology, and their learnings informed the YFP during its initial phase when Srivastava was the co-director of PUKAR (2002–2005). For him, the YFP was to operate with the motto "documentation as intervention" with the belief that getting the city's residents to "be aware of their neighbourhoods, histories and localities through research and documentation ... empowers them with skills to be able to negotiate their status as citizens in a confident and knowledgeable way. It encourages them to produce knowledge and use it to transform their environments" (Srivastava, 2005). Systematic explorations about their context were to increase their awareness and help residents negotiate their precarious position in the city, produce knowledge and improve their environments.

Srivastava was appointed to the position by US-based professors Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, who founded PUKAR in 2002. Along with Srivastava, Vyjayanthi Rao, an anthropologist based in New York, was also appointed to this position where she worked on a project on "postindustrial landscapes." The founders conceived PUKAR in response to concerns about globalisation processes and the deterioration of Mumbai's universities and colleges as democratic spaces of learning and knowledge production. "[F]ull citizenship today," wrote Appadurai in 2006, "requires the capacity to make strategic inquiries—and gain strategic knowledge—on a continuous basis" (p. 168). Appadurai believed that research was an "essential capacity for democratic citizenship" given that it nurtured the ability of learners "to inquire, to analyze and to communicate". For these reasons, he supported the experiment that proposed using "research as a right" to help youth sustain themselves amid a rapidly changing world as well as contribute to their city and its future. Research, through place-based inquiries, was to function as the primary way of learning that integrated theory and practice.

#### Box 1: About PUKAR

With PUKAR, Appadurai intended to

place knowledge and action, specifically creative action, artistic action, political action, in some common framework and to do so with an eye to a number of ambitious goals for any place, but certainly for Mumbai. One goal was to insist that research and action in what we would call the arts, humanities, film, media, should not be separate from research on the economy, infrastructure, and planning. The second aim was to have a local constituency but to recognise that Mumbai, like many other cities, is embedded in global processes, and thus to develop a cadre of younger people, who were not only academics, but who shared an interest in the city's future, and in locating the city in the world. (Appadurai, 2006, p. 174)

PUKAR's Youth Fellowship, then, originates from Rahul Srivastava's Wilson Neighborhood Project, Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge's insights on globalisation and education, and a pilot conducted at PUKAR led by Vandana Khare called the "Tarunai Project." Located under PUKAR's "Marathi Public Sphere Initiative," the Tarunai Project ran from 2004–2005 with support from a small grant from Sir Ratan Tata Trust. Based on the pilot project experience, PUKAR launched the Youth Fellowship in 2005. To summarise, cultivating a sociological lens towards the self and the world around fellows was key to PUKAR's approach towards sustainable urbanisation.

#### Box 2: About the Tarunai Project (precursor to the Youth Fellowship)

##### The project

was aimed at engaging the youth in self and locality documentation to articulate their concerns about urban life. It explored the process of research and documentation as tools for pedagogy and social intervention. The participants were Marathi speaking youth associated with various organizations—educational, government and non-government. They represented diverse socio-economic and educational strata and had no previous experience. They worked in groups on themes relevant to their experiences. The broad themes were environment, language, migration, sexuality and globalization. For their documentation, the participants made innovative use of various media such as photography, songs, interviews, paintings and poems. The process has also been documented into a Marathi book 'Paach Prashna Shambhar Uttare'. PUKAR partnered with Mobile Creches, Maharashtra Nature Park, Girangaon Rojgar Hakk Samiti, R. A. Podar College of Commerce and Economics and St. Joseph College for this project. (PUKAR, n.d.).

## AIMS AND STRUCTURE OF THE YOUTH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

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The YFP is a 52-week, 11-month-long fellowship and has been running every year since 2005 (barring 2013–14). The YFP has been working with a cohort of 40–300 participants each year, representing a range of backgrounds, including college students, social workers, labourers, architects and more, by deliberately intending to reach out to youth from marginalised social backgrounds. The programme, by design, legitimises all kinds of prior knowledge and is, therefore, not biased against lack of formal educational opportunities but creates a learning pathway that is interdisciplinary, problem-oriented and solutions-focused, enabling cross-learning opportunities to be fostered through the process. The programme is designed in a way that prioritises formal and non-formal processes to guide learning, including stimulating action. In this way, primacy is given to multiple kinds of knowledges as the pivot to drive the learning process. The Centre for Lifelong Learning, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai accredited the YFP as a certificate programme in 2017 and later as a diploma programme in 2018.

"Barefoot Researchers"—a term coined by Appadurai for YFP alumni—are encouraged to be creative in sharing their research findings through plays, poems, posters and more. The YFP starts with intensive sessions on how identities such as caste, gender, class and religion play a pivotal role in limiting social mobility, dignity, justice and interpersonal dynamics. Facilitators aim to establish this foundational awareness that would inform their research topics and methodologies. Research is conducted in groups of 8–10 without the designated hierarchies of "principal investigator", "data entry assistant" and others, encouraging democratic values among the researchers.

Through its pedagogy, YFP also prioritises research ethics, acting on findings and acting on the role that dominant and non-dominant identities play for researchers and participants. Because of their executive role throughout the knowledge production cycle—from choosing their research topics and methodology to taking action based on their findings—fellows have a sense of ownership over the process. Facilitators take steps to encourage fellows to be accountable to vulnerable research participants. The programme is taught using limited resources and encourages whole body, hands-on learning through role plays, games, debates/dialogues, discussions and more.

PUKAR has designed the programme based on the following priority:

Barefoot Researchers (BRs) use the city itself as a learning lab to build new knowledge *without the intermediary of a formal structure of learning that tends to otherwise distance them from their contexts*. In this process, the youth get exposed to existing hierarchies and social, cultural, and economic diversities of the world to which the learner/researcher belongs, thus enabling them to reflect upon themselves, challenge the prevalent wisdom to make arguments about their future and become problem-solvers for the future of their cities. (Gangavane et al., 2016, p. 198)

The YFP has changed in multiple ways since its conception in 2005. Table 1 documents some of these changes.



Table 1: Shifts in the programme over the years

2005–2013	2014–2017	2017–2022
<p>Thirty groups of about 8–10 fellows would enrol in the program. Each PUKAR coordinator would mentor about 10 groups. Workshops focused on the self, research methods, data collection, analysis, reports, outputs and more. Each group would send two members to these workshops (members would rotate) and they would share their learnings with the rest of the group. Each fellow had to write an autobiography during the initial part of the programme. Each group had to organise three events, one every 3–4 months, in the localities they belonged to or where they wanted to conduct research. The events were supposed to be related to the topic of their interest, to share their findings, or to engage with local residents. PUKAR team members responsible for the programme, called coordinators, would meet groups every week to facilitate their learning process. Fellows were tasked to read about one piece of news for these meetings. Groups were interviewed together based on their interest and social background. A grant of ₹60,000 in total was given to each group for research-related expenses for the year. The programme was singularly funded by the Sir Ratan Tata Trust Foundation subject to routine evaluations. “Advanced YF” was offered to alumni who wanted to conduct more in-depth research under a mentor.</p>	<p>Notably, in 2013–14, the programme was closed and lack of funding was cited as the reason. PUKAR team members searched for funding. They scaled down the programme in terms of the number of groups (from 300+ fellows per year to about 100 fellows) and grant amount (from ₹60,000 per group per year, to ₹33,000 per group per year). There were about 10 groups per year during this period. Thematic workshops were introduced such as those on gender, the constitution, the environment and more. The workshops conducted in the previous period continued with some variations based on the team's interests, resources and schedule. Diverse funders supported the programme, including EdelGive Foundation, Gunvati J. Kapoor Foundation and India Development Service.</p>	<p>TISS accredited the YF, first as a certificate programme in 2017 and then as a diploma programme in 2018. Rules such as credit-hour requirements, regimented assignments and attendance were solidified and mandated. There were not as structured during the previous two periods. The grant reduced to ₹30,000 and was based on the expenses that were submitted. A fee, that gradually increased to ₹ 3,000 for the entire year, was introduced for fellows who could afford it. This amount would be submitted to TISS for the purpose of the certificate. Funders who supported the programme were Sinha Kikeri Foundation and American Jewish World Service.</p>

Source: Compiled by authors

During the period 2005–2013, the programme functioned at a large scale, with about 300–400 fellows completing the programme each year, with each coordinator mentoring about 100 fellows (10 groups). The period from 2014–2017 emphasised more contact with fellows during workshops and

consequently, knowledge-based workshops were introduced. The post-2017 period was defined by the TISS accreditation, which brought in some opportunities as well as structural requirements that define the formal educational system (grading, fees, attendance and mandatory hours and sessions).

Our focus, in this research, is primarily to assess the programme as an alternate learning model; introspect on the underlying pedagogical processes and its impact; assess the range of localised knowledge production being complementary to technocratic and non-critical processes of knowledge production; and assess the impact of such an intervention on individual learning experience, professional trajectories, building of critical capacities and on agency to participate, act and reflect.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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We followed a qualitative approach in our study. Our approach relied on multiple modes of enquiry such as a review of internal records on the programme and published material,<sup>1</sup> a focus group discussion with six alumni who were employed at PUKAR managing programmes other than YFP or working in administration, and interviews with over 40 people involved in the programme in various capacities, including alumni, current fellows, former facilitators and coordinators, and a funder. We conducted in-depth interviews with 18 alumni and five coordinators/facilitators. We conducted detailed interviews with 12 fellows who were enrolled in the programme as part of its latest batch (August 2021 to June 2022) and the person who oversaw funding for the programme for eight years. We conducted a focus group discussion with six alumni who were employed at PUKAR either managing other programmes or as part of the administration team. We conducted an email interview (based on the person's request) with the executive director who has been overseeing the programme since 2005. We conducted brief interviews with two youths who attended PUKAR's outreach events. We conducted brief email interviews with external supporters of the programme. Interviews started in January 2022 and concluded in September 2022.

Initially, we planned to interview a larger number of fellows actively enrolled in the programme with the intention of gaining more specific evidence. We recruited a researcher from outside of PUKAR to conduct the interviews to build trust in the research process, as the other researchers working on the study had decision-making power over the fellows. This was an important decision to address an ethical concern we had noted in the early stages of the study. Despite bringing in an external researcher, we noted that some fellows were offering repetitive responses to some of the questions and it was decided to interview past fellows in order to gather reflections on the fellowship and simultaneously, assess their trajectories and deliberate on the role of YFP in their professional trajectories.

We used purposive sampling method as we were evaluating specific aspects of the programme from the perspectives of specific groups of people. We interviewed one alumni fellow from each year since 2005. We interviewed key decision-makers such as facilitators and programme directors based on their

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<sup>1</sup> Internal records include reports submitted to funders. Public material includes three books published by PUKAR on the Youth Fellowship Program (YFP), research articles covering PUKAR's work and annual reports published by PUKAR.

involvement in decisions, period of association and social background to speak to the decision-making aspects across the programme's history. However, one major limitation of our research process is that the researchers are employed by the organisation that runs the programme under review. We found it difficult to reach members associated with the programme who had not had a positive experience and to be critical of the programme. For example, one former team member, who played a vital role in shaping the programme during its early years, declined to be interviewed when one of the co-authors asked her (who was also an active staff member), stating that the person had an unpleasant work experience. Another limitation is that internal records about fellows' backgrounds and other aspects of the programme were fragmented. This limited our use of secondary data to identify broader trends and patterns. We have used pseudonyms to protect the identities of research participants and to maintain confidentiality. Subsequent references to individuals will utilise these pseudonyms.

Following is a summary of key themes that were explored with respect to a particular stakeholder (Table 2).

Table 2: Stakeholder insights and key questions

Stakeholder	Key Questions
Facilitators/coordinators of the programme	Approach towards their role, justification of major choices/changes, key challenges and successes
Alumni of the programme	Research topic(s), workshops, group work, capacities, challenges, post-fellowship trajectories
Fellows who were enrolled in the programme during the interviews	Pedagogy, research topic(s), workshop, group work, capacities, challenges
Funder and supporters during the outreach process	Limitations and strengths of the programme, views on how it has changed, suggestions on how it can be improved

## KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS: PERSPECTIVES FROM MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS

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### Association with the Youth Fellowship: Fellows and Facilitators/Coordinators

Fellows were attracted to the programme for multiple reasons. These included:

- Interest in learning research, which was perceived to be something new and intriguing.
- The opportunity to learn about their locality and city and the changes that were taking place.
- A desire to improve the social work they were already engaged in through research.
- College was offering the programme, while some offered monetary stipends.
- The fellow was requested by a friend to join the programme or wanted to spend time with the friend/friend group (the requirement to have 8–10 people per group has probably contributed to this reason).
- Some women were attracted to the programme as it offered a reason they could use to negotiate to leave their homes with their parents or guardians.
- The flexibility of attending sessions on Sundays attracted some fellows who worked during the week or attended college.

One fellow, who then became a full-time PUKAR employee, was attracted to the uniqueness of the programme that made it seem not like “education”:

"मुझे पुकार के बारे में, मेरे कॉलेज में जो पहले वाला बैच था उनसे पता चला। वह भूत और मुंबई में जो हॉन्टेड प्लेसेस हैं उनके ऊपर रिसर्च कर रहे थे। वोह थोड़ा यूनिक लगा। और यह एजुकेशन नहीं लगा ये अच्छा लगा था उस टाइम पर। थोड़ा हटके है, कुछ अलग है और वह अट्रैक्ट किया, लगा कि ऐसे कुछ करना चाहिए।"

*"I came to know about PUKAR from the previous batch of my college. They were conducting research on ghosts and haunted places in Mumbai. That seemed a bit unique to me. Also, it did not feel like education and it felt good that time. It is a bit out of way and a bit different, that attracted me, I felt that something like this should be done."*

The fellowship amount, which ranged from ₹60,000 (2005–2012) to ₹30,000 (currently) per group, was almost never directly referred to as the reason someone joined the programme.

Facilitators, several of whom were fellows who graduated from the programme, believed strongly in the programme's potential. Some were interested in exploring the city of Mumbai more deeply. Other facilitators were attracted to the opportunity of using research for social change.

### Importance of the “Right to Research” to the Respondent

Two facilitators echoed the view that “anyone can do research,” with one critical of the barriers posed by academic qualifications and other markers of privilege such as language and occupation (tied to caste, gender, class and more). Several facilitators believed that enrolling marginalised groups in the research process was an empowering process. The rhetorical framing of “रिसर्च हम भी कर सकते हैं [We too can do

research]" was shared by fellows during interviews. It indicated an act of talking back against privileged knowledge producers of the city.

### Fellows' Relationship with their Research Topics

The process of choosing a topic is difficult given that all group members have to agree on working on one topic for over five months. Each fellow within the group might have a different interest and priority and this impacted their involvement in the research. Facilitators encourage fellows to choose topics that are, to varying degrees, connected to (a) their social background (gender, religion, sexuality, caste and more); (b) a phenomenon taking place close to where they live/study; and/or (c) prevailing socio-political events.

For example, one group chose to inquire about the Muslim community's perspective on triple talaq (close to the time after the law was passed) and attitudes towards homosexuality among college students (around the time that Section 377 was decriminalised). Ideal research topics are not only personal but also ones that impact a large group of people. One fellow took that approach to think about an urgent issue. The fellow remarked, "अगर गोवंडी में कोई पूछे कि आपकी समस्या क्या है, तो पहला जवाब था पानी की समस्या। [If someone asks what problems we have in Govandi, the first answer would be water problem]" The fellow went on to research water rights in the context of urban informal settlements.

When another fellow was asked about why they chose to research about women who do domestic work, this was the response:

"जैसे कि, मेरे घर में एक ही महिला है – मेरी माँ, और वह घरकाम करती है। मेरी चाची भी घरकाम करती है। आजूबाजू में जितनी भी महिलाएँ हैं वह सारी घरकाम करती हैं। इस वजह से, जैसे कि मैं मेरे घर में भी देख रही हूँ तो मैंने सोचा कि आजूबाजू के घर में भी ऐसा है तो यही मुद्दा उठाके रिसर्च करें।"

*"For example, my mother is the only woman in my house, and she does the domestic work. My aunt also does the domestic work. All the women around also do domestic work. As I noticed that is the case in most households in the area, I thought that it should be the subject of research."*

This fellow's critical investigation of a practice that is taking place within her household has the powerful potential of countering traditional education's disconnect between lived realities and textbook knowledge and priorities.

### Group-based Research and Hierarchies within the Group

Groups were formed usually on the basis of fellows staying in the same locality, studying at the same college, or working at the same NGO. In rare cases, various smaller groups were clubbed together to form a group of about 10. In the first year and to a lesser degree in the subsequent two years of the programme, there were hierarchies of senior fellows and junior fellows where, for example, a schoolteacher would apply for the role of senior fellow and the teacher's students would join as junior fellows. The fellowship amount would also be given to the senior fellow. Seeing the hindrances in free expression and learning caused by these hierarchies, the roles were abolished and fellows were accepted to the programme on the basis that each member would have an equal say in decision-making. Along with removing the labels, the fellowship amount was also given to different fellows in different instalments.



Fellows felt that the group-based nature of the programme helped them develop listening, creative thinking and negotiation capacities in contrast to individual-centric learning processes. One coordinator shared that:

"एक ग्रुप में अलग अलग मेंबर्स के साथ रिसर्च करने से अग्रीमेंट और डिसअग्रीमेंट को कैसे एक्सेप्ट करना है वह सीख सकते हैं। मुझे लगता है, रिसर्च प्रोसेस के साथ साथ ग्रुप का अपना एक प्रोसेस है। ग्रुप में काम करते हैं तो बहुत सारे डिफरेंस ऑफ़ ओपिनियन आते हैं। उसे एक्सेप्ट करना है, हर एक का सुनना है, अगर एग्री नहीं करते हैं हम फिर भी सुनना कितना इम्पोर्टेंट है, ये सारे वैल्यूज सीखने को मिलते हैं।"

*"By doing research with different members in a group, we learn how to accept agreement and disagreement. I think, alongside the research process, the group has its own process. When we work in a group, there are many differences of opinion. We have to accept them, and we should listen to everyone. Even when we do not agree, it is important to listen. These are the values we got to learn."*

A fellow remarked that group work was key to long-term work and enabled more creative work and unique ideas.

"पहले रिसोर्स पर्सन ने एक वर्कशॉप लिया था। उन्होंने कहा, 'साथ में चलोगे तो दूर तक जाओगे, और अकेले चलोगे तो तेजी से जाओगे।' तो मैंने वहाँ से सीखा कि हमें ग्रुप में काम करना है तो साथ में चलना पड़ेगा। मेरा मानना है कि ग्रुप में अगर काम करते हैं तो उसके बहुत फायदे हैं। वह काम को हम पूरा कर सकते हैं, साथ-साथ हम एक दुसरे को समझ भी सकते हैं। क्योंकि अकेले काम करेंगे तो हम सिर्फ हमारी खुद की सोच से करेंगे, पर ग्रुप में काम करेंगे तो अलग अलग आइडियाज मिलेंगे और काम में क्रिएटिविटी होगी।"

*"The resource person had conducted a workshop in the beginning. He said, 'If you walk along with others, you will go far, and if you walk alone, you will reach fast.' So, from this, I learnt that if we want to work in a group, we have to undertake the journey together. I believe that there are many benefits if we work in a group. We can complete the work, and also understand each other. If we work alone, then we can only work with our own thoughts, but when we work in a group, we get different ideas and there will be creativity in the work."*

Group work was far from conflict-free in the context of the YF. Facilitators/coordinators and later, mentors had to play the role of nurturing team spirit among fellows and were frequently called on to play the role of mediators when conflicts arose. One fellow spoke about how "de facto" leaders would exist and took the responsibility of taking on tasks that others did not find interesting. One fellow also spoke about how fellows had varied levels of interest in different parts of the research process. For example, some were more interested in the interview process while some were more interested in the action stage of the research.

## Inter-group Learning and Support

There was immense potential for learning and support across different groups in the same cohort. One coordinator spoke about the importance of the cohort where people came from varied positions of power and privilege. They shared that

"मुझे नहीं लगता कि कोई भी ग्रुप मेंबर ने किसी भी मेंबर को ऐसे कभी बोला है कि 'यह अनाथ है' या 'इनके साथ ऐसे ही बर्ताव करना चाहिए' या फिर 'ये कमर्शियल सेक्स वर्क्स के बच्चे हैं तो उनसे हम बात नहीं करेंगे' ऐसा कभी नहीं हुआ है।"

*"I don't think that any group member has ever said to another member that 'This person is an orphan' or 'Such people should be treated poorly' or 'These people are the children of commercial sex workers, so we will not talk to them'. This has never happened."*

Another fellow, who became a full-time employee of PUKAR, narrates the level of support each group provided to another (that was cultivated by the PUKAR coordinator):

*"जैसे शशि का जो ग्रुप था उसने ब्लाइंड हॉकर्स [अंध फेरीवाले] पर रिसर्च किया था और उन्होंने सिग्नेचर कैपेन चलाया था ताकि सभी लोग फेरीवालों से अच्छे से पेश आए। रेलवे लाइन के पास उनका जो बिज़नेस है जारी रखने के लिए एक लेटर सबमिट करना था तो हमारे कोऑर्डिनेटर और उनके अंडर जो पंद्रह ग्रुप थे वह सब गए थे। हम रेलवे के कुछ ऑफिसर्स से मिले, वहा पे हमने उन्हें वह लेटर सबमिट किया, मतलब इससे एक सिस्टम बनती है। परेल में जो नाईट स्कूल चलती थी, उस स्कूल को उन्होंने एक्सपैंड किया और उसका उद्घाटन करने के लिए सारे ग्रुप गए थे। इस प्रकार का भी काम साथ में चलता था। कम्युनिटी में कोई भी एक्टिविटी हो तो मुझे अटेंड करना है। मेरे रिसर्च से संबंधित इवेंट है तो दूसरे ग्रुप मेंबर को अटेंड करना है। सबके लिए सभी इवेंट में जाना शायद पॉसिबल नहीं होगा लेकिन इस प्रकार से भी हम कुछ कर सकते हैं।"*

*"For example, Shashi's group, who carried out their research on blind hawkers, conducted a signature campaign so that everyone would pledge to behave well with the hawkers. For the hawkers to be able to carry out their business by the railway line, our coordinator, along with the 15 groups under them, went to submit a letter. We met a few railway officers and submitted a letter at the office. All of this sets up a system in place. There was a night school in Parel which had been expanded, so all the groups went for the inauguration. This type of work was also done together. If there was any activity in the community, then I would have to attend it. Likewise, if there was an event related to my research, then the other group members would have to attend it. It would not be possible for everyone to attend all the events, but we tried to do it this way."*

The intensity of inter-group learning support varied over time, depending on the facilitator's approach to creating opportunities for groups to connect with one another. Often, when several groups are researching a similar theme (such as women and labour), the facilitator organised specific workshops that respond more closely to their themes.

### **Views on what Constituted "Awareness", "Advocacy" and "Action"**

PUKAR's YFP team has deliberated on what constitutes "advocacy" and "action" since the programme's inception along with PUKAR's role in facilitating advocacy and action. These deliberations should be seen in the context of efforts to separate PUKAR's approach from the traditional research process that, to a large extent, ends with the publication of a paper and usually "benefits" the researchers disproportionately than research participants/subjects.

One coordinator, from the early period of the programme, said:

*"There were a lot of conflicts, you know? Producing knowledge itself through research by itself was an intervention. That was PUKAR's big argument at that time [2005]. I remember that the people at Tata Trusts wanted to take us on to the next step of helping young people, building an organisation or actually take the next step in taking their work forward. Rukmini was quite direct that this is not something that we should do."*

Rukmini is a pseudonym for a leading member of the organisation, who at the time felt fellows should independently take their work forward. The funder's representative also directly shared:

"मुझे लगता है एक गैप था। युथ फेलोशिप, युथ को जिस लेवल पे लाकर रखती थी और बाहर जो प्रोग्राम चलते हैं उसमें युथ को कनेक्ट करने में एक थोड़ा सा गैप था।"

*"I think there was a gap. There was a slight gap in connecting the youth to the certain level at which the Youth Fellowship was brought them and the programmes that were conducted outside."*

One coordinator spoke more about the difference between "awareness," and "advocacy."

"हमारे टाइम पे प्रोग्राम इसी तरीके का था, जैसे कि फेलोशिप का एक साल होता था और उसमें बताया जाता था कि आपकी टीम को कम्युनिटी में २-३ इवेंट्स करने हैं। हम उसे एडवोकेसी नहीं बोलते थे पर अवेयरनेस इवेंट बोलते थे, क्योंकि मुझे नहीं लगता वो एडवोकेसी है। उसके जरिए हम लोगों को सिर्फ अवेयर कर रहे थे कि सिचुएशन ऐसा है। पर उसके बेसिस पे कोई एक्शन प्लान नहीं हुआ था। और शायद टीम अभी भी उसी तरीके से फंक्शन कर रही है जबसे मैंने छोड़ा। एक प्रोसेस खत्म नहीं होती है तो दूसरी प्रोसेस शुरू हो जाती है, तो फिर एक्शन के लिए हमारे पास टाइम और ह्यूमन रिसोर्स होना एक्सपेक्टेड है।"

*"The programme was the same during our time. For example, the fellowship was for one year and the team was told that they would have to conduct 2-3 events in the community. I did not call them 'advocacy' but used to call them 'awareness' events. I didn't think that it was advocacy, because, through the process, we were making people aware that the situation is a certain way. However, no action was planned based on it. And maybe the team is functioning similarly ever since I left. Before one process ends, another one begins, so we expected to have time or human resources for action."*

The tensions between advocacy, awareness and action are important to understand in greater depth. Since the programme is conducted every year, as one batch reaches its final stage of "taking action", the facilitators and programme team have to swing into action for the outreach process for the next batch and attention to facilitate the "action" stage is divided.

A lead facilitator co-authoring this report reflected that:

*"If PhD students are not expected to take action to address social injustices that they study about within the 3+ year time frame in which they conduct their research, how do we expect our fellows who face barriers to study to do so? The expectation to learn how to conduct research, practice the learning and take action places a big burden on facilitators."*

## Fellows' Views about the Facilitator/Coordinator

One fellow recounted the coordinator's efforts in addressing the power hierarchy between the fellow and coordinator.

"हमारे जो कॉर्डिनेटर थे, शायद उनके पास एक स्ट्रक्चर होता था कि वह हमारे ग्रुप के साथ सभी एक्टिविटी में पार्टिसिपेट करेंगे। जैसे, अगर हम ४:३० पे बायोग्राफी लिखने के लिए बैठे, तो वह भी बायोग्राफी लिखने के लिए बैठते थे। शायद हर ग्रुप के साथ वही बायोग्राफी रिपीट करते थे। वो लिखते थे फिर हम एक साथ आगे पढ़ते थे। हम पढ़ेंगे तो वह भी पढ़ेंगे। तो ये एक था, अभी आप वोह करते हैं या नहीं मुझे मालूम नहीं। ग्रुप के बारे में आपको मालूम है लेकिन आपके बारे में ग्रुप को कितना मालूम है, वो शायद एक बैरियर रहेगा तो वो कभी

आपको मानेंगे नहीं। आपको वह टीचर लेवल पे मानेंगे या तो सीखने की उम्मीद से ही आपको देखेंगे कि ये आये हैं तो कुछ सिखा के ही जायेंगे। और अगर सिर्फ सिखा के जायेंगे तो हम अपने टीचर के साथ कितना रिलेट कर पाएंगे। हम उनसे एक फ्रेंड की तौर पे नहीं रिलेट कर पाएंगे तो वो शायद एक चैलेंज हो सकता है।"

*"Our coordinator probably had a structure to follow, under which they would participate in all the activities of our group. For example, if we sat down at 4:30 p.m. to write a biography, then the coordinator would also sit with us to write a biography. They probably used to repeat the biography with all the other groups too. They used to write it first, and then we would read it. If we read something, then they would also read. So, this was one thing, I don't know if you do it now or not. You know about the group, but how much does the group know about you? This can be a barrier as they will never acknowledge you fully. Maybe they will perceive you as a teacher, thinking that this person comes to teach so they will definitely teach us something in each session. So they will relate to you as a teacher but may not be able to relate to you as a friend, which can pose a challenge."*

In the teacher–student relationship, the teacher usually creates tasks for the student to respond to, rather than collectively sharing without an authoritative "correct" answer. Disclosing aspects of oneself is a deeply vulnerable process, one where power is being given up gradually.

For one fellow, it was the facilitator's empathy and listening capacity that informed their relationship.

"फैसिलिटेटर्स का बर्ताव बहुत ही सकारात्मक और हमेशा फेलोज के लिए अवेलेबल होना ऐसा रहा है। वह कभी भी किसी को डाँटते नहीं है, किसी के साथ भेदभाव नहीं करते हैं। कोई गलती भी करता है तो भी कुछ प्रॉब्लम नहीं है। और हमेशा लोगों को सोचने के लिए या सोच को बढ़ावा मिले इसके लिए अलग अलग चीजे करते रहते हैं। फेलोज के साथ एक सामान रिश्ता बनाते हैं, फेलोज के प्रोब्लेम्स समझके लेते हैं।"

*"The behaviour of the facilitators has always been positive and to always be available for the fellows. They never scold anyone nor do they discriminate against anyone. If anyone makes mistakes, it will not be a problem. They always do different things to make the fellows think or to encourage thinking. They maintain an equal relationship with the fellows. They try to understand the problems of fellows."*

Another fellow noted that the coordinator played the role of "challenging you to think" through questions and connecting the fellow to resources:

"हमारी कोऑर्डिनेटर हमें मिलने आती थी और हमें इनपुट देती थी। ये एक थॉट प्रोवोकिंग प्रोसेस होता था। और फिर वह हमें बोलती थी कि आप यह करो, इनसे मिलो, वह करो। यह काफी इंटरस्टिंग प्रोसेस था। आपके टॉपिक, सिचुएशन के लिए जो जरूरी हो वह इनपुट कोऑर्डिनेटर देती थी। हमेशा हमें विचार करने के लिए चैलेंज करती थी। जैसे मुझे याद आ रहा है कि फैसिलिटेटर के रोल में जूही का काम था हमें सवाल पूछना, जिससे आप ज्यादा सोच सके और काम कर सके। सही समय पर वह सही रिसोर्सेस देते थे, जैसे कि रिसोर्स पर्सन या कोई रीडिंग या कोई मूवी।"

*"Our coordinator used to give inputs to us. This was a thought-provoking process. Then she used to tell us to do things, [such as] meet that person, do that thing. This was a very interesting process. The coordinator used to give inputs that were essential to our topic and situation. She always challenged us to think. Like, I remember, the role of Juhi being a facilitator was to ask questions so that we can think a lot and work. She used to give the right resources at the right time such as a resource person, a relevant reading or a movie."*

The coordinator would motivate fellows to read about a topic, and she herself would read and provide thought-provoking and socio-culturally relevant material, and encourage others to do so as well. A fellow felt that the facilitators were flexible and encouraged the fellows to make choices.

"फैसिलिटेटर्स में फ्लेक्सिबिलिटी थी। वह जो बोले वैसे ही होना चाहिए ऐसे नहीं था। फ्लेक्सिबिलिटी थी, लिबर्टी थी और वह इनपुट भी देते थे कि आप ये सोचो। ये हो सकता है क्या? आपको ये करना है क्या? ये जरूरी है क्या? जब हम सवाल पूछते थे तब भी उन्होंने इनपुट दिए।"

*"There was flexibility in the facilitators. It should be whatever they said, it was not like that. There was flexibility, liberty and also, they used to give inputs that you should think about. Can this happen? Do you want to do this? They also provided inputs whenever we asked questions."*

One facilitator said that it was crucial for the facilitator to intervene in the process of learning to support fellows who are shy and introverted in nature, and to keep balance among the fellows.

### Views about the Formal Education System and Youth Fellowship

A fellow who was enrolled in the programme during this interview shared more about the differences between the formal school system and the YFP. In the former, the fellow would have to *"think 10 times about what to say in front of a professor"*.

"इधर जो पावर है वह अथॉरिटी वाला पावर नहीं है। तो उसकी वजह से एंटमॉस्फीयर फ्री हो जाता है, कि यहाँ आप कोई भी डाउट, स्टुपिड सवाल पूछ सकते हो। और वो लोग सुनके ले रहे हैं, आपको समझके ले रहे हैं। पर वह स्कूल में नहीं होता, कॉलेज में भी आप आपके प्रोफेसर से कुछ भी नहीं पूछ सकते, यह फर्क है, यह वाइड गैप है जो प्रोमिनेंटली [उभरके] दिखता है।"

*"In one there is a teacher, in the other there is no power of authorisation because of which the atmosphere is free. You can ask any doubt, any stupid question, and they are listening and trying to understand you. But this does not happen in school or college. You don't ask any question to your professor, this is the difference and this is the wide gap which is prominently visible."*

For this fellow, the YFP created a free atmosphere in contrast to the hierarchies that exist in the formal education system. Facilitators make efforts to address the "sir" "ma'am" culture where the teacher is the gatekeeper and provider of knowledge and the student is the recipient. Fellows have spoken about how it is difficult to think openly within such structures.

A fellow described the learning process as relying on the decisions of learners (self-driven model):

"पुकार में जब आप खुद से चीज़ें सीखते हो तो आप अपने पैरामीटर्स खुद से ही बिल्ड करते हो, कि मुझे क्या सीखना है? मुझे कैसे सीखना है? इसमें मैं अपनी एक्सिस्टिंग स्किल्स को और कैसे इस्तेमाल करूँ या उनका कैसे फायदा उठाऊँ, तो ये एक सेल्फ ड्रिवेन मॉडल की तरह है। मुझे लगता है ग्रोथ के लिए ये काफी जरूरी है। मुझे लगता है हमेशा एक्सपीरियंस बेस्ड सीखना सबके लिए होना चाहिए। आप सिर्फ थिओरी न पढ़ाओ, बस कॉन्सेप्ट्स न पढ़ाओ, वह कॉन्सेप्ट्स का एक्साक्टली मतलब क्या है या फिर जिंदगी से वह कैसे कनेक्ट करते हैं वह समझाएंगे तब वह किसी के लिए भी इंटरेस्टिंग होगा।"

*"When you learn things by yourself in PUKAR, you build your own parameters, like what do I have to learn, how do I learn? How can I use my existing skills or leverage them. So, it's in a way a self-driven"*



*model. I think it is very important for growth. I think it should always be experience-based learning for everywhere, only theory should not be read, not just concepts but what those concepts mean in your life or how they relate to your life. Someone's interest will be built only if this is explained."*

In this context, the YF's approach directed them to be accountable to their skills, and communities rather than to a system that is disconnected from their realities and futures. A facilitator in PUKAR's 2015 Annual Report is quoted stating that

The focus has never been to stick to any particular format, but instead to constantly invent and re-invent ways in which new spaces can be designed. The Youth Fellows also assume the role of leaders. It becomes essential to adopt tools and strategies for intervention, which thus, break down the power dynamic between the facilitator and the participant. (PUKAR, 2015, p. 21)

The structure of the programme was to be responsive.

### **Views about Formalisation Processes**

In PUKAR's 2015 Annual Report, the organisation documented its experience offering a two-credit course titled "Research as Pedagogy, Advocacy and Transformation" in Mumbai's Dr. BMN College of Home Science in November 2014: "It was an opportunity to cross over from outside the system and step into creating an alternative space within the system." Reflecting on the experience, a facilitator is quoted saying:

We sat on the ground instead of benches, we formed a circle and talked to each other instead of standing in front of a blackboard and talking to students, we learned through discussions and movies instead of only textbooks, and in the end, we documented our learning in a rather formal way. But the best part was that everyone took an active role in the process. (PUKAR, 2015, p. 28)

Aside from colleges, PUKAR has collaborated with TISS as well NGOs. Several years back, the Youth Fellowship team had heated debates about whether to accredit the course from the Centre for Lifelong Learning at TISS as a diploma and certificate course. Would the accreditation validate the knowledge fellows produce? Would the accreditation help fellows in their future endeavours? The team members agreed, based on the account of one leading member. However, they also had apprehensions about TISS's regulating pressures. A lead facilitator, co-authoring this report, reflected that:

*"It was a big achievement for the team to get accredited with a well-known institute like TISS after the gap and major loss in the funding sources (2013–14). On the other hand, the TISS accreditation impacted the profile of the fellows and vulnerable groups like naka workers, construction workers, domestic workers and transgender people. The major focus shifted to run the course as per the credit requirements, attendance and assessment processes."*

Another lead facilitator, co-authoring this report, reflected that:

*"When the Youth Fellowship was not accredited by TISS, there was complete freedom in this course. What to do and what not, at that time some workshops were planned according to need, which was very beneficial for the fellows."*

This reflection was followed by a sense that PUKAR should look inwards and cultivate legitimacy on its own terms rather than look elsewhere. Further research into these collaborations and experiments will reveal insights into the pedagogy's adaptability.

### Views on the Programme's Impact on Fellows' Agency

The YFP starts with a workshop on the "self". Several fellows spoke about how this was often the first time they deeply explored their own identities. A fellow who was enrolled in the programme during the interview shared that:

"सेल्फ वाले वर्कशॉप में मैंने खुद को जाना, वह बहुत बड़ी बात थी, क्योंकि खुद ने खुद को कभी नहीं जाना तो उस टाइम पे जाना।"

*"In the workshop on the self, I understood myself and it was a great thing. Because I was not aware of myself and I understood it at that time."*

A fellow who was enrolled in the programme during this interview reflected on their personal growth during the fellowship, specifically how they feel their agency has increased.

"मेरे घर में भी स्त्री पुरुष समानता नहीं थी। मतलब बोलते हैं ना कि बेटा ऐसे कर सकता है, बेटी ऐसे कर सकती है, तो मैं मेरे मम्मी पापा को सिखाते रहती हूँ कि ऐसे नहीं है, वो जो कर सकता है वह हम भी कर सकते हैं। मैंने खुद में ये इम्प्रूवमेंट लाया है। जैसे वर्कशॉप होते रहते हैं, तो मैं सब चीज का ऑब्जरवेशन करती हूँ। और खुद में बदलाव लाने की कोशिश करती हूँ। मैंने खुद को जाना, पहले नहीं जानती थी। खुद को बहुत अकेला महसूस करती थी। और बोलते हैं ना, पीछे पीछे रहना आगे नहीं आना वैसे ही मैं खुद को पीछे ढकेलते रहती थी। दुसरे आगे जाते थे तो मैं देखती थी और बोलती थी वो कर पा रहे हैं, पर मैं नहीं कर पाऊँगी। लेकिन मैं अभी मेरी लाइफ में भी ये इम्प्लीमेंट करती हूँ कि वह कर सकते हैं तो मैं भी कर सकती हूँ। ऐसे करके खुद को मैं इम्प्रूव करती हूँ वर्कशॉप से।"

*"There was no equality between men and women in my house either. They say that sons can do like this, or daughters can do like that, so I keep teaching my mummy-papa that this is not like that and whatever he can do, we can also do. This is an improvement. So workshops keep happening, I observe everything. I try to change myself. I got to know myself which was not the case before. I used to feel lonely. And don't they say, 'Stay behind and don't come ahead'. That's how I used to push myself behind. When others would go ahead, I used to look and say, that they are able to do it but I will not be able to do it. But now I am implementing it in my life too that if they can do it, I can also do it. By doing this, I improve myself through the workshops."*

The fellow speaks about the process of challenging deeply held norms at the family level and internalisation of feelings of inferiority.

One facilitator observed that the learning space potentially made one participant feel safe in being visible.

"हिरेन एक ट्रांसजेंडर व्यक्ति के रूप में इतना विज़िबल नहीं था, पर ये प्रोसेस ने उसे एक सपोर्ट दिया और एक्नॉलेजमेंट दिया। धीरे धीरे उसकी जर्नी को हमने एक स्पेस दिया, एक व्यक्ति और संस्था की तरफ से भी उसे एक्नॉलेज किया। वैलिडेट और रेकगनाइज किया। इस जर्नी में हम दूर से ही सही पर ये हम बोल सकते हैं।"

*"Hiren as a transgender person was not that visible, but he received support through the process and received acknowledgement. We gave space to his journey. Personally, as well as by an organisation also he got acknowledged. He was validated and recognised. We can say that, in this journey, we were part of it even if we were far."*

Using tools such as laptops that were once inaccessible also contributed to the increase in one fellow's agency:

*"डाटा एनालिसिस के समय में जब लैपटॉप की बात हो रही थी तो मैंने कभी लैपटॉप नहीं चलाया था। तो जब डाटा कलेक्शन पूरा होके हमारे हाथ में आया तो डाटा को हमें इंटरनेट के द्वारा कंप्यूटर या लैपटॉप में डालना था। तो हम लोगों ने पहले ये कभी नहीं किया था, जैसे कि उसका ग्राफ बनाना, डाटा को एक्सप्लेन करना, उसे और डीप में जाके एनालिसिस करना और एक्सप्लेन करना। ये मैं पहली बार कर रहा हूँ, मैंने कभी पहले नहीं किया है, ना ही मेरे फ्रेंड सर्किल में किसी ने किया है।"*

*"At the time of data analysis, when talking about laptops, I had never used a laptop before. After the completion of data collection, we received data in our hand, at that time we had to put the data in a computer or laptop through the internet. We had never done such things before, like preparing graphs, explaining the data and going deeper and analysing and explaining it. I am doing it for the first time and have never done it before, nor has anyone in my friend circle done it before."*

Exercising agency is also linked to questions of power and authority. One fellow, who joined PUKAR as an employee, spoke about their transition to asking questions about what people in positions of power told them.

*"मैं मध्य प्रदेश के बहुत छोटे से गाँव से हूँ, तो वहाँ के अलग ही माहौल में पला बढ़ा हूँ। जिसमे ये सिखाया जाता है कि बड़े बुजुर्ग अगर बोल रहे हैं तो सही ही बोल रहे हैं। कोई थोड़ा भी पढ़ा लिखा बोल रहा है तो सही ही बोल रहा है। तुम्हे सवाल करने की जरूरत नहीं। यूथ फेलोशिप प्रोग्राम करने के बाद समझा कि शायद वह गलत भी हो सकता है। उसका प्रोफेशनल लाइफ पे भी असर पड़ा है। आज के ज़माने में शायद अगर कुछ चीज़ें होती हैं, कोई डाटा या कोई खबर भी आती है तो उसे मैं क्रॉस चेक करने की कोशिश करता हूँ।"*

*"I am from a small village in Madhya Pradesh, so I grew up in a different environment there. It is taught there that if an elderly person says something then it must be correct. If someone who is even a little educated says something, they must be correct. There is no need for you to ask questions. After completing the Youth Fellowship Program, I understood that this might be wrong. It has had an impact on my professional life too. Nowadays if something happens, some data or news comes, I try to cross-check it."*

The PUKAR team, in an article for an edited book, recounted the narrative of one fellow to describe the increase in self-esteem through research.

From being taunted for hailing from 'Mini Pakistan' and compelled to contest her own notions of belonging, to now, bustling with confidence and unafraid of opinions, Suraiya, a youth fellow, spent one year in chronicling outsiders' perceptions of Mumbra. It was in an attempt to look beyond the common notions of this neighbourhood suburb of Mumbai as a "Muslim ghetto" – in lieu with the Bombay riots of 1992–93 – Suraiya and her friends conducted a series of interviews and discussions with the non-residents. Armed with skills and a more nuanced understanding taught at YF, Suraiya

has now become secure in her own skin, and has developed strong arguments about her community when negotiating the city. (Gangavane et al., 2016, p. 205)

Self-reflection is key to the "capacity to act." One fellow felt that the initial stage of the fellowship was most powerful because

*"I was just questioning what I was doing. Why am I doing this? So at that time I really had to work with a piece that is why I am. I mean if I had to spend a year it really has to resonate with my personal values at that time so that was important."*

Another fellow spoke about how she often likes to speak and share her opinion but that during the programme she would try to step back and listen more to understand different perspectives.

### Views on the Research Process

For fellows, the flexibility and adaptability of the research process enabled them to deeply understand multiple perspectives of a phenomenon. One fellow, who then became an employee at PUKAR, spoke about the interview stage of her research on inter-religious marriages in Mumbai.

"वह बहुत सेन्सेटिव टॉपिक था जिसको लेकर लोगों से बात करनी थी। हमने जब इंटरव्यू लेना सही समझा तो लड़कियां थी जिन्हें ये फेस करना पड़ रहा था, उनका इंटरव्यू लेना सही समझा। फिर बाद में लगा, कि सिर्फ इनका लेके क्या करेंगे, जिनसे उनकी शादी हुई है उनका क्या? फिर हमने उनके पति के लिए भी कुछ सवाल तैयार किये और उनका इंटरव्यू लिया। फिर उसके साथ में ये सामने आया कि परिवार में साँस का बहू की तरफ रैवय्या, नजरिया अलग होता है। बहू को कुछ भी बोला जाता था, किसी प्रोग्राम में शामिल नहीं करते थे, और बोलते थे कि तुम अलग मजहब से आये हो, और अगर आये हो तो हमारा मजहब अपना लो। ये बिंदी लगाओ, मंगलसूत्र पहनो, और वह अगर मुस्लिम है तो तैयार नहीं होती थी। तो फिर हमें लगा कि उनका भी क्या कहना है हमें जानना चाहिए। तो हमने उनके लिए भी इंटरव्यू के सवाल तैयार किये।"

*"That was a very sensitive topic [interfaith marriages] about which people had to talk about. At the time of interviewing, we felt it right to interview girls who are facing it. Later, we felt, what is the use if we interview only these girls, what about those whom they are married to? Then we prepared some questions for their husbands and interviewed them. It came out from the interviews that, in the family, the attitude and perception of the mother-in-law towards the daughter-in-law was different. The daughter-in-law was called anything, she was not involved in any programme, and it is said to them that you belong to a different religion and as you have come in our family then adopt our religion. Wear this bindi, wear the mangalsutra, and if she was Muslim, then she was not ready for this. Then we felt we should know what they have to say too. So, we prepared interview questions for them too."*

Another fellow, who also became an employee at PUKAR, spoke about the interview stage of her research on public playgrounds for children.

"हमारा ग्रुप का जो रिसर्च था उसे हमने टाइटल दिया था कि 'खुली जगह की तलाश, बच्चों के मन में खेलने की आस'। बेसिकली रोज-मर्रा की जिंदगी में हम देखते हैं कि बच्चे छोटी जगह में कैसे खेल रहे हैं। लेकिन इतना ऑब्जरवेशन नहीं था। जब हमने ये टॉपिक लिया तो हमारा, पर्सनली मेरा क्रिटिकल थिंकिंग बढ़ा कि वह किस तरीके से खेल रहे हैं? उनकी सेहत पे क्या असर पड़ा, मेंटली उनके ऊपर क्या असर हो रहा है? और बाकी चीजों पे भी क्या असर हो रहा है? अगर स्पेस की बात करें तो लड़के कौनसे खेल खेल रहे हैं? लड़कियों के

कौनसे खेल है? पहले लड़कियों को हमने शामिल नहीं किया था, लेकिन जैसे जैसे हम रिसर्च करते गए तभी लगा के लड़कियों के खेल के बारे में देखना चाहिए कि ये स्पेस से उनकी लाइफ पे क्या असर पड़ रहा है। सो बेसिकली मेरा क्रिटिकल थिंकिंग ये रिसर्च से बहुत बढ़ गया है। पर एक्शन बेस्ड इतना नहीं रहा।"

*"We kept the title of our research 'Search for open space, desire of children to play'. Basically, in everyday life, we see how children are playing in a small place. But the observation was not much. When we chose this topic, it increased our, personally my, critical thinking that in what way are children playing? What is the effect on their health, how is it affecting them mentally? How is it affecting other things? If we talk about space, what are the games boys are playing? What are the games for girls? We did not add girls initially, but eventually as we went on researching, we felt that we should look into the sports of girls and how the space has an effect on their life. So basically, my critical thinking has increased due to this research. But it was not action based."*

This example provokes questions related to gender inequality, the loss of commons, health and well-being and more. In both quotes, attempts are made to wrestle with real-world urban complexities that are not easily captured in textbooks and formal, in-classroom learning.

## Fellows' Views about Social Identities, Power and Privilege

A fellow, who later became an employee at PUKAR, held views supporting gender equality, but was against caste-based reservation before joining the fellowship. The fellow stated:

"वाय. एफ. पी. में जब हमें खुद टॉपिक लेकर रिसर्च करना था ना, तो हमने इतना ब्रैनस्टोर्मिंग किया था, डिबेट किये थे। उसमें बार-बार मेरी तरफ से कास्ट के बारे में पॉइंट्स उठ रहे थे और हम सबने कास्ट को ही फोकस करने का सोचा था कि देख लेते हैं, एक्चुअली ये है क्या तो इसलिए हमारा पहले साल का रिसर्च भी कास्ट पे था। तो मेरी सोच उस दरमियाँ चेंज हो गयी, जब हम युथ फेलोशिप के पहले साल में थे। मेरा जो ओपिनियन था कि इकोनॉमिकली बैकवर्ड लोगों को रेज़र्वेशन मिलना चाहिए, न कि कास्ट के आधार पर मिले, वह चेंज हो गया।"

*"In the YFP, when we had to choose our topic of research, we did a lot of brainstorming and debates. During those conversations, caste-related points were repeatedly raised by me and we decided to focus on caste only so that we could see what it actually is. So, our first-year research topic was also on caste. My opinion that economically backward people should get reservation and not on the basis of caste, had changed."*

Previously, one fellow strongly believed that love beyond heteronormativity was not possible, but gradually began thinking beyond these binaries. One fellow reflected on feelings of inferiority linked to their class position and shared:

"यूथ फेलोशिप ने मुझे मौका दिया जिससे मैं बात करने लगी, सोचने लगी, स्टेप्स लेने लगी। मैं रिसर्च सीख पाई, जो बिल्कुल मेरे रडार पे कहीं नहीं था। कम्युनिटी को अलग नजर से देख पाई। पहले मैं बहुत हेसिटेट करती थी। चॉल में रहना, गरीब घर में रहना मैं लोगों को नहीं बोल पाती थी। मेरे दोस्त नहीं थे उसकी एक ये भी वजह थी कि ये जो क्लास वाला मुद्दा है कि मुझे लगता था, मेरा घर बहुत छोटा है और लोग आएंगे तो हसेंगे, हमें गरीब समझेंगे तो मेरा पावर कम हो जायेगा। वैसे भी पावर था ही नहीं। तो जो है वो ठीक है, उसको और कम क्यों करना, तो ये सभी वाली बातों पर सोल्यूशन मिला कि मेरी कम्युनिटी कितनी रिच है और मैं कितने अलग नजर से देख पा रही हूँ। मेरा कॉन्फिडेंस कैसा है, मुझमें लीडरशिप क्वालिटी कैसी है? इसके साथ मैं कम्युनिटी को समझ पाई। अलग अलग लोगो से मिल पाई तो ये तो मेरा फायदा ही है वाय. एफ. पी. से जुड़ना, पुकार में आना।"

*"The Youth Fellowship gave me an opportunity to start speaking, thinking and taking steps. I learnt research, which was absolutely nowhere on my radar. I was able to see the community from a different perspective. I used to hesitate earlier. I could not share with people [that I am] staying in a chawl, staying in a poor family. I did not have friends and one of the reasons for it was this. I used to think that my house is very small; if people come to my house, they will laugh, they will consider us as poor, then my power will decrease. Anyway, there was no power. So, whatever is there, it is fine, why should it be reduced further. So, I got a solution for all these things that my community is rich and how I could perceive it differently. How is my confidence, how is the leadership quality in me, along with it I also understood the community. I was able to connect with different people and this is the advantage of being a part of YFP and PUKAR."*

Feelings of inferiority were internalised based on caste as well. One fellow recounted the powerless, fearful and bad feeling they experienced during college and the importance of affirming their humanity:

"पहले तो जेंडर का वर्कशॉप हुआ था, उसमें मुझे फीमेल, मेल और दूसरा जेंडर, उनको हम छक्का और हिजड़ा बोलते थे, ये पता थे। तो उनका जब बुधवार और रविवार का दिन रहता था तो वह लोग साठे नगर में आते थे, तब बस्ती के लोग मारते थे उन्हें, चिढ़ाते थे। मतलब उनको कोई सम्मान नहीं करता था। ऐसा मैंने मेरी कम्युनिटी में देखा था। तो फिर यहाँ आये तो पता चला वो तो है ही पर और भी अलग अलग लोग होते हैं, अलग जेंडर होते हैं फिर वहा से पता चला कि उनकी भी रिस्पेक्ट करनी चाहिए। हम जैसे हैं वैसे वह भी हैं, उनको भी सम्मान मिलना चाहिए। और मेल या फीमेल एक ही जेंडर के दो लोग प्यार भी कर सकते हैं और रिलेशन भी रख सकते हैं ये मुझे नहीं पता था। पहले मैं उस चीज़ को बहुत गलत मानती थी। अब जैसे वर्कशॉप किया, फैसिलिटेटर ने बताया ऐसे कुछ नहीं हैं और वो नेचुरल हैं। प्यार है, नेचुरल है, कभी भी हो जाता है सेम जेंडर हो या अपोजिट जेंडर हो, तो हो सकता है, ये समझ आया। पहले तो मैं ये फैक्ट बता रही हूँ कि मैं एक एस. सी. कैटेगरी से बिलोंग करती हूँ। तो मेरे कास्ट को लेकर मेरे साथ एक इंसिडेंट भी हुआ था। जो ओपन कैटेगरी के लोग थे वह मेरा बहुत मजाक उड़ाते थे। मुझे बहुत गिल्टी लगता था। मुझे लगता था मैं बहुत छोटी जात की हूँ। तभी कॉलेज में वो दो साल बहुत मुश्किल से काटे थे। फिर वहाँ से निकली तब ये जेंडर का वर्कशॉप अटेंड किया तो हमें सिखाया कि मानव क्या है, सब एक ही तो है। ये सब समाज ने बनाया है। और हम उसकी तरह चल रहे हैं। उसकी तरह मत चलो। हमें क्या लगता है, हमें क्या करना चाहिए, हम किसको किस नजर से देखे, वो हमारे ऊपर डिपेंड करता है। तो ये डर मैंने छोड़ दिया कि मैं छोटी जात की हूँ। तू जिस जात का है मैं उस जात की नहीं हूँ। मैं एक ह्यूमन हूँ। तो फिर अभी वो डर ख़तम हो गया है उसकी वजह से।

*"Firstly, there was a workshop on gender. I knew female, male and the other gender whom we used to call chhakkas and hijras. Wednesdays and Sundays were the days when they used to visit Sathe Nagar. That time, community people used to beat them, used to tease them. No one respects them. That's what I witness in my community. After I came here, I came to know that apart from them, there are different people, different genders; then I came to know from there that they should also be respected. They are the same as we are and they should get respect. I also did not know that two people from the same gender, either male or female, can also love each other and be in a relationship. I did not know that and earlier I used to think of these things as very wrong. Now I have participated in a workshop and the facilitator told me that there is nothing like that and it is natural. It is love, it is natural and it can happen anytime with the same gender or the opposite gender, so it is possible, I understood this. Firstly, I am stating the fact that I belong to the SC category. So, an incident occurred to me because of my caste identity. People from the open category used to make a lot of fun of me. I felt very guilty. I used to believe that I belong to a very low caste. I spent two years in college with great difficulty. When I left college, I attended a workshop on gender, there we were taught what human beings are and that all are equal. All this is constructed by society. And we are following it. Do not*



*follow it. What we feel, what we should do, how we should perceive others depends on us. So, I dropped the fear that I belong to a lower caste. I do not belong to the caste to which you belong. I am a human being. So now that fear has ended because of the workshop."*

## Views on Language

A fellow who was enrolled in the programme during this interview voiced the need for workshops on English to allow fellows who are not fluent in the language to improve.

"सामने वाले को इंग्लिश भाषा आती भी है कि नहीं या जिनको इंग्लिश नहीं आती है उनकी हेल्प करें। क्योंकि मुझे इंग्लिश भाषा नहीं आती थी। जैसे कुछ वर्कशॉप इंग्लिश में हुए थे तो मुझे वह समझ में नहीं आ रहे थे। तो ऐसे सिचुएशन में वो लोग इंग्लिश भाषा का भी वर्कशॉप रखें। एक तो हमें पूछे कि आपको इंग्लिश समझ रहा है कि नहीं या इम्प्रूवमेंट के लिए कुछ कर सकते हैं हमारे लिए।"

*"Whether the person in front of you knows English language or not, help those who do not know English. Because I did not understand the English language. For example, some workshops were conducted in English, which I could not understand. Then for such situations people should conduct workshops on English language as well. Firstly, they should ask us if we understand English or if we are not understanding it, then they should do something to improve our language."*

## Discussion of "Action" and Questions over Structural Change

Despite limitations, some facilitators and fellows share remarkable examples of efforts led by fellows to mobilise residents to address chronic issues such as lack of suitable sanitation and water supply, and lack of recognition and support for blind informal vendors in local trains and more. One fellow shared:

"मैं पानी हक समिति से जुड़ा तो इंडिरेक्टली मेरा उस चीज़ पे एक्शन हुआ था, जैसे कि मेरे घर में और मेरी कम्युनिटी में पानी का आना। घर में मतलब हमारा जो एम् ईस्ट वार्ड है, उसमें आज की तारीख में ३०० से ज्यादा नल लगे हैं। ३०० से ज्यादा नल मतलब एक नल में पांच फॅमिली मेंबर्स तो करीब १५०० से २००० के ऊपर लोगो को नल मिला है। तो ये एक्शन तो हुआ है।"

*"As I was connected with the Water Rights Committee, indirectly I took action on the same thing, like water coming to my house and in my community. In my house, that is, our M East Ward, more than 300 water taps have been installed till date. More than 300 taps means one tap for five family members, so about 1,500 to 2,000 people have received the water tap. So, this action has happened."*

"हम आज तक इतने दिन से पानी भरते आये हैं और पानी के हक के बारे में पता नहीं था। पुकार में आने के बाद पता चला कि ऐसा ऐसा है हक है राइट है, सरकार से सवाल करना चाहिए तो उसके ऊपर हम जानना चाहते थे कि एक्चुअल में इसका मुद्दा क्या? मतलब कि वजह क्या है पानी न आने की तो जानना ये चाहते थे कि एक्चुअल में क्यों नहीं आता है पानी? मतलब ऐसा पानी क्यों नहीं आ रहा है?"

*"Till date, we are storing water and we were not aware about water rights. After coming to PUKAR, I came to know that there is such a right. We wanted to ask questions to the government, so as to understand what the actual issue is. What is the reason for not getting water, or why does water not actually come?"*

A facilitator took the initiative to bring together fellows from similar backgrounds to conduct a structural intervention.

"हमें कॉन्स्टेंटली 5 साल तक अनाथ आश्रम से ग्रुप आया था। स्टूडेंट्स आते थे और उनकी कॉमन डिमांड यह होती थी कि 'हमारे पास आइडेंटिटी कार्ड्स नहीं हैं। हम लोग यहाँ पर १८ साल तक रहते हैं, १८ साल के बाद हमें खुद रहना पड़ता है, लेकिन हमारे पास खुद के आइडेंटिटी कार्ड्स नहीं होते हैं।' फिर हमने उन्हें मदद करने के लिए संतोष शिंदे के साथ कनेक्ट कर दिया था। संतोष यह हमारे महाराष्ट्र के सी. डब्लू. सी. बोर्ड पर भी थे। चाइल्ड राइट्स के मुद्दे पर संतोष शिंदे एक जानेमाने कार्यकर्ता हैं। उन्हें इस मुद्दे पर सारी चीजों के बारे में पता है। महाराष्ट्र स्टेट लेवल पे पॉलिसी के मुद्दे पर उन्होंने काम किया है। तब हमने संतोष शिंदे के साथ काफी इंगेजमेंट किया और बताया कि यह देखो यह स्टूडेंट्स ने हमारे पास चार साल से रिसर्च किया है। बार-बार यह स्टूडेंट आते हैं, उनकी यह कॉमन डिमांड है कि क्या हम इसके बारे में कुछ कर सकते हैं? तो हमने न्यूज़पेपर में आर्टिकल लिखा। चार साल की रिसर्च को एक करके, सिंथेसिस करके प्रेजेंट किया। उसको अलग-अलग जगह पर लेकर गए और संतोष शिंदे गार्नर करते थे। धीरे धीरे सब चेंज हुआ और फिर एक गैप हो गया बीच में, लेकिन कही तो उसमें चीज़ें आ गई, किसी ने करी। जो एक परसेंट रिजर्वेशन आया उससे हमारा कोई दूर तक कनेक्शन नहीं था, लेकिन इस तरीके से चीज़ें होनी चाहिए ये कही पे थॉट प्रोसेस था। शायद अगर उसको हम पुश करते पुकार में एक ग्रुप बनता जो कांस्टेंटली अडवोकेसी या मूवमेंट/आंदोलन के लिए या जो अलग-अलग चीज़ें होती हैं वहां जाता, ऐसे जो लोग हैं उनके साथ कनेक्ट रहता, स्टूडेंट्स के साथ होता, क्योंकि बेसिकली उनकी डिमांड वही थी जो कई सालों से कर रहे हैं। बाद में वह आगे बढ़ी। कुछ पॉलिटिकल लीडर्स, एक्टिविस्ट्स थे जो ये पूरा आगे तक लेके गए। लेकिन जब रेजर्वेशन और ये सब हुआ, तो जो सारे स्टूडेंट हमारे साथ कनेक्टेड थे उन्होंने कहा कि 'देखो अब यह हुआ पर वो टाइम पर हमारे पास इसके बारे में जागरूकता नहीं थी'।"

*"For five years continuously, groups from the orphanage came to us. Students used to come and their common demand was, 'We do not have identity cards. We stay here for 18 years; after completing 18 years we have to stay by ourselves, but we do not have our own identity cards.' Then to support students, we connected them with Santosh Shinde. Santosh was a member of the CWC [Child Welfare Committee] in Maharashtra. Santosh Shinde is a well-known activist on child rights issues. He knows everything about child rights issues. He has worked at Maharashtra state level on policy issues. Then we did a lot of engagement with Santosh Shinde and told him that, 'Look, these students have been conducting research for the last four years. These students have come again and again and they have a common demand can we do something about it?' So, we wrote an article in the newspaper. We compiled research for four years and presented it after synthesis. We took the issue to different levels and Santosh Shinde used to garner it. Everything changed slowly, then there was a gap in the middle, but somewhere things came in it, someone did it. When one per cent reservation came, we did not have any connection in it, but it was the thought process that things should happen this way. Perhaps, if we had pushed it, perhaps a group would have been formed in PUKAR, which would go there constantly for advocacy or movement or whatever happens for different things, stay connected with people who are there, with students, because basically their demand is the same which they have been doing for many years. Then it moves forward afterwards. Political leaders, activists were there who brought it further. However, when the reservation was implemented, the students who were connected with us said, 'Look, this has happened now, but during our time, we did not have awareness about it'."*

One group that was researching about train vendors who are visually impaired wrote about their process of acting on their research findings:

"मुंबई लोकल रेलवे में जो ब्लाइंड हॉर्क्स होते हैं, उनके बारे में एक ग्रुप ने रिसर्च करके ये हॉर्क्स को रेलवे में हॉकिंग करने के लिए मुंबई रेलवे लोकल कर्मचारियों का समर्थन या मदद मिलने में की गयी एडवोकेसी कामयाब रही। उस वजह से जो ब्लाइंड लोग, जो आम तौर पर भिक्षा मांगने का काम करते हैं, उन्हें रोजगार या कमाई का साधन इससे मिल गया और कुछ सहायता हो गयी।"

हमने एक डॉक्यूमेंट्री बनायी थी। उसमें कुछ बाइट्स थे और कुछ नरेशंस थे कि उनका लाइवलीहुड कैसा होता है। उस समय मराठी और इंग्लिश न्यूज़ पेपर में हमारे प्रोजेक्ट के बारे में लिख के आया था। और उस समय ये हॉकिंग जो रेलवे कानून के हिसाब से गैरकानूनी एक्टिविटी है तो हमने कोशिश करके एक ब्लाइंड कॉन्फेरेंस रखी थी। कम्युनिटी इवेंट किया था, उसमें अलग अलग तबके से लोग आये थे जो ब्लाइंड नहीं होते हैं, वह शामिल थे। लेबर यूनियन के लोग होते हैं या हमारे लिए जो ब्लाइंड लोगों के लिए काम करते हैं और रेलवे के जो स्टाफ, ऑफिसर्स होते हैं उनको हमने कॉन्फेरेंस में बुलाया था।"

*"One of the groups did study on blind hawkers in the Mumbai local railways and advocated successfully to get permission for hawking in railways and support from the Mumbai local railway staff. Because of this, blind people, who usually had to beg for survival, got employment or a means for earning and they got some help.*

*We made a documentary. There were some bites and narrations about their livelihood. At that time, Marathi and English newspapers wrote about our project. Since hawking was then an illegal activity under the Railway Act, we tried and organised a blind conference. We conducted a community event and people from different strata, those who are not blind, participated in it. We invited people from the labour union, people who worked with blind people, and railway staff and officers for the conference."*

Another group that researched about views about caste among college students, aimed to share their research findings in the publishing domain by presenting their audio-documentary at a Hindu religious space (Ganpati mandal).

"हमने जों कास्ट [जात] की डॉक्यूमेंट्री बनायी थी, वह हमने जहाँ १० दिन तक अलग अलग प्रोग्राम होते हैं ऐसे अलग-अलग गणपति मंडल [गणपति जहां पर बैठते हैं] को दी थी और वह वहां १० दिन तक लोगों को दिखाई थी। जितने लोग आते थे, वह देखकर जाते थे। कास्ट जैसे विषय पे एक व्हिडिओ बना के गणपति मंडल में चलाया, जहाँ बहुत ज्यादा भीड़ होती है। उससे कम से कम कुछ लोगों के विचारों में कास्ट डिस्क्रिमिनेशन को लेके जो उनकी राय होगी वो बदलने में मदद मिली होगी। एक्शन रिसर्च का ये बहुत बड़ा पार्ट होता है।"

*"We gave the documentary on caste that we prepared to different Ganpati mandals [where Ganpati sits] where for 10 days, different programmes are organised and there, for 10 days this documentary was shown. People who used to visit watched it. We prepared a video on a subject like caste and played it in the Ganpati mandal, where there are a lot of crowds. It must have helped in changing the opinion of at least some people regarding caste discrimination. This is a big part of action research."*

This would have involved the task of negotiating with the decision-makers of the *mandal* to talk about an issue that is seldom critically discussed, particularly in Hindu religious spaces.

## DISCUSSION ON RESEARCH FINDINGS

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### In Search of Barefoot Researchers: Profile of Fellows

The YFP centrally believed that research should be a right and that anybody can do research, and thus challenged the dominant identifiers of being a researcher. This was exemplified by the programme's catchphrase "Barefoot researchers for better communities". The term is inspired by "barefoot doctors" who were trained in basic medical skills and worked as healthcare providers in rural China.

Facilitators and coordinators were responsible for reaching out to prospective fellows. They described the outreach process as dependent on their existing networks, and most facilitators and coordinators came from a Marathi-speaking, social work background. Some were involved in social movements. They would approach colleges since it was easier to mobilise groups of 8–10 people than through other avenues. However, they would aim to go to peripheral and under-resourced colleges. Facilitators, coordinators and later mentors would also go to shelter homes, NGOs and collectives to recruit fellows. For several consecutive years, the fellowship enrolled one group from an institutional home for orphans in Mumbai based on a coordinator's relationship with the institutional home.

PUKAR's long-standing involvement in three specific informal settlements (Mankhurd, Reay Road and Dharavi) also contributes to its reach. Since the start of the programme, most fellows have been women and girls, Muslim, Dalit, Adivasi and working-class or poor, residing in the city's informal settlements. This has also meant that the programme has had to respond to the needs of a diverse set of learners. Specifically, for example, knowing that some fellows could not afford to eat well, one former facilitator spoke about the decision to provide meals during workshops to all fellows. The programme's response, however, has been varied.

In the past year, leading members at PUKAR have expressed remorse while sharing their observation that fellows are increasingly from privileged backgrounds and are interested in obtaining a certificate from TISS at a relatively low fee. Their involvement would qualify as proof of doing "social work" for opportunities at foreign universities. One leading member frequently recounts a fellow's name, Rajesh Kumar, a construction worker, to exemplify the leading member's desire to make the programme reach "the most marginalised". This desire to reach the "most marginalised" is paradoxical, given the multiple priorities and projects of the organisation. The constant mention of Rajesh Kumar reminds us of what Jennifer Nash said:

In the case of both transnationalism and intersectionality, the bodies that are constantly invoked are symbolic, meaning that women's studies engages them not as fleshy material beings, but as metaphors, as promises (and often as peril), as site of hope and also as site of failure. (Nash, 2015, p. 75)

What social background should most fellows come from? Most importantly, how does the programme need to be restructured to engage with fellows as "fleshy material beings"? These questions require further attention, especially given the importance that "inter-learning spaces" hold to understand and grapple with urban complexity. Allen et al. (2022) write:

Inter-learning spaces bring together diverse professions, social identities, knowledges and practices in dialogue with each other. Interlearning, in this context, refers to a process whereby the intentional juxtaposition of different, contrasting and complementary knowledges and practices generates new forms of living and working together (p. 451).

### **Profile and Training of Facilitators, Coordinators and Directors**

Programme facilitators, coordinators and directors are largely trained in the social sciences and in Marathi as the primary medium of instruction, along with fluencies in Hindi and English. None had a doctoral degree, aside from the head of the organisation. Facilitators have limited experience in academic research and limited formal training in teaching in the formal education system. Most have experience working in the social sector and are to learn “on the job” through observation, experiments and through the act of “doing” in an apprenticeship model. Many facilitators were fellows who had graduated from the programme. One alumnus went on to lead the programme for over five years. They drew on their experience as past fellows to respond to the needs of current fellows, along with responding to the organisation's and job's needs. The organisation has a stated intention of hiring employees whose social background and training are similar to the programme participants. This, they believed, would enable the employees to bring in their lived experience to change the structure and pedagogy of the programme and help them relate to the fellows.

### **Fellow–Facilitator Relationship**

Several facilitators shared that they prioritised cultivating a relationship of co-learning and working as equals, in contrast to the traditional student–teacher relationship where an expert educates a learner. One facilitator described this aspect of the programme as emotionally intensive, where bonds are built between individual fellows and facilitators. Facilitators guide them, motivate them, take an interest in their lives, create a safe space to deliberate over mistakes and discuss avenues for further growth by tapping into their resources and networks. Practically, this takes place by spending additional time with fellows, calling one another by their first names and cultivating a culture of asking questions. However, facilitators' involvement in other projects at the NGO and shifting priorities about the organisation's management have limited the time spent on relationship-building efforts during specific periods of the programme.

### **Experiential Pedagogy**

Facilitators and coordinators believe that understanding, valuing and critically reflecting on lived experiences was vital. This took place through activities, practices, discussions and other pedagogies that encourage whole-body learning. One facilitator shared that the feminist belief in the personal as political was implemented through activities such as the river of life, which requires a fellow to write about their life experiences. The conventional research process was aimed to be challenged by starting the research endeavour with this activity, along with others that highlight social inequalities based on caste, gender, class and sexuality, thereby revealing the power disadvantages and privileges of fellows. Radhika, an alumnus of the programme, linked the discrimination she faced as an individual to the group level and at the level of structures:

"पहले मुझे थिओरी पता नहीं थी, टर्मिनोलॉजीज़ नहीं पता थी। मेरे साथ जो हो रहा है वह सिर्फ मेरे साथ ही हो रहा है, ऐसे लगता था। इस कोर्स के जरिये जैसे मैं दूसरे लोगों से मिलती गयी, लोगों के अनुभव सुनती गयी तो मुझे समझ आया कि मेरे जैसे बहुत सारे लोग हैं, जिन्हें जेंडर, कास्ट, क्लास इन बातों को लेके, अलग अलग लेवल पे भेदभाव का सामना करना पड़ रहा है। तो विक्टिम/पीड़ित सिर्फ मैं अकेली नहीं हूँ, हर कोई अलग अलग लेवल पे है और दोष सिस्टम का है।"

*"I did not know the theory, nor did I know terminologies earlier. I thought that what was happening to me was happening only to me. Through this course, as I kept meeting different people, listening to their experiences, I realised that there are many people like me who are facing discrimination on the grounds of gender, caste, class at different levels. So, I am not the only victim, everyone is a victim at different levels and the fault lies with the system."*

When asked about the differences in the formal education system and the experiential-based learning in YF, alumni Janhvi shared:

"मुझे फ़र्क दिखता है। १२ साल तक हमें सिर्फ पुस्तकों/किताबों के माध्यम से पढ़ाया गया, किताब के बाहर क्या चल रहा है, कैसे चल रहा है, वह हमें कुछ बताया नहीं गया है। पढ़ो और मार्क्स लाओ, इतना ही सिखाया गया था। पर मैंने एक्टिविटी के दौरान यहाँ सीखा कि समाज कैसे चलता है, समाज में क्या चीज़ें हैं वह जाना।"

*"I see the difference. For 12 years, we were taught only through books. We were not told what is going on outside the books, how it is going on. Study and get marks, that's all they have taught us. But during activities [during research] I learned how society works, what are the things in the society."*

Janhvi felt engaged through the pedagogy used during the fellowship.

### Group-work and Negotiations

In formal schooling, individual performance is valorised and nurturing collaboration and navigating conflicts is undervalued (Patel et al., 2017). The YFP functions on the premise that research and learning must be conducted in groups and in the absence of power-laden designations such as principal investigators and research assistants. Working in groups enabled fellows to place their lived experiences alongside that of others and understand that some of them are shared experiences, produced by oppressive structures, which they can collectively fight against. It also allowed them to understand and empathise with experiences different from their own. At a wider level, learning with and from each other in groups also helped them gain a critical lens on their mainstream education, which does not take into account differences in lived experience (as it is likely to be designed and delivered by people and groups from privileged sections of society), making such education "textbook-ish"/limited to books, as Janhvi says above.



## Pathways of Research-oriented "Action"

There is a growing desire for research to not stop at publishing papers, but also to contribute to addressing social inequities. PUKAR has often used the word "action". The YFP has consistently examined the dimension of "action" as a key axis of learning and impact.

Finding decent work, social mobility and aspirations are vital concerns in the urban context and the YFP has deliberated on this dimension, particularly on livelihoods. Thinking about post-fellowship trajectories involves asking fundamental questions about the programme. Should it be designed around preparing fellows to contribute to knowledge production in the mainstream and catalyse individual social mobility? Should it be designed to get fellows to join social movements? And yes, these are not separate paths and the programme cannot determine paths, but asking these questions can guide future choices related to the programme, given the ways in which the programme both changes and stays the same each year. In the context where NGOs have become "depoliticizing, conformist, and even statist agents", questions over post-fellowship trajectories are essential (Bornstein & Sharma, 2015).

## REFLECTIONS BASED ON RESEARCH

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Our focus, in this research, has primarily been to assess the YFP as an alternate learning model; introspect on the underlying pedagogical processes and its impact; assess the process underlying a range of localised knowledge production as a counterpoint to technocratic dimensions of knowledge; and assess the impact of such an intervention on individual learning experience, professional trajectories, building of critical capacities and on agency to participate, act and reflect.

There are two aspects that we would like to focus on: firstly, on the merit of operationalising an alternate, complementary urban education intervention; and secondly, on strengthening the existing YFP model.

Many urban education processes are underway, both in the formal and informal realm. YFP offers significant learning for such an educational intervention. These can be broadly categorised around the profile of the participants, fostering a relationship between facilitators and learners, careful articulation of the pedagogical process, emphasis on the learning process as an end goal and emphasis on "research to action pathway" and not on "research" or "action" only.

Participants need to reflect the dynamics of the city and therefore, it is important to create a learning cohort that reflects diversity, vulnerability and marginality that exists in a city. One of the critiques of modern higher education has been that it is disconnected with the realities of urban life. The careful selection of participants would, therefore, enable learning about urban life in a local context and create pedagogical bridges to enable the appreciation of the urban complexity. Coordinators/facilitators are to play a crucial role in this learning process. Firstly, they themselves have to be representative of the city's diversity and play an important role in ensuring diverse enrolment. Secondly, owing to their backgrounds, they are key actors who can enable the creation of safe learning spaces, build trust in the learning process and crucially contribute to creating non-hierarchical learning structures. The pedagogical

process is by far a key learning axis in such an intervention. A process that is (a) devoid of hierarchies; (b) focused on promoting group learning; (c) emphasises fostering of social relationships; (d) recognises a “research” entry point as a learning template; and (e) promotes a learning culture that emphasises individual agency building as a pivot to nurture “pathways to action” are key elements defining such an educational intervention. It is important to recognise that, in such a learning model, the learning goal may not necessarily be a tangible output (such as a research report, data, etc.) but be focused on deliberations on complex issues in a localised context and its dynamics and an empowering process that enables a participant to identify one’s own practice in the urban. The following reflections aptly summarise the power of a research-oriented learning template:

Perhaps the lack of actual project reports is emblematic of one of PUKAR’s primary goals: to think of research as a ‘process-oriented learning journey rather than an end product-oriented goal’. ... The ‘impact’ of these research projects is then less related to the actual research itself and more intertwined with the impact of the process of research on youth who had formerly not thought of themselves as ‘researchers.’ (Maharawal, 2012, p. 682)

Given its current successes, one wonders what PUKAR would look like if, in addition to its focus on individual empowerment, it was explicitly working with a social justice movement in Mumbai or working to start one. To put this another way, how could the important work of empowering people to research their own lives around issues of health, gender, and their neighborhoods also serve to have a material impact on these very same people by building community power? Perhaps individual empowerment through research is only a starting point for the kinds of collective struggles necessary to fully realize Appadurai’s goal of ‘the human right to research’. (Maharawal, 2012, p. 683)

To repeat, a programme like the YFP as an urban education intervention that is research focused allows participants to carry out research around crucial issues that impact their own lives, build capacity and ability to unpack the various elements defining urban life and use that as a learning template to imagine individual empowerment as a starting point for collective action and struggle. These, we believe, are necessary ingredients to conceptualise an urban education which is responsive to the realities of unplanned, haphazard and complex urbanisation at play in many parts of the world.

On strengthening the existing YFP and expanding its effectiveness, the following key dimensions emerge from our research. These are broadly aligned to ensure that desirable outcomes emerge from an urban education intervention such as the YFP. Firstly, it is important to ensure that the profile of the fellows is representative of the urban reality, reflects widespread diversity and vulnerability and for which, a carefully designed outreach process is emphasised. It is important to reiterate that participant diversity is key to the learning process and as a pedagogical innovation. It is equally important through the outreach process, therefore, to emphasise the importance of the YFP in enabling individual empowerment towards identifying “pathways to action” and not being a skill-oriented, employment-focused intervention. Secondly, the process of learning should be anchored around multiple pivots, such as various markers of social identity (caste, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.), or alternate forms of knowledge and knowledge production processes (such as poems and street plays). This would maintain a balance between mainstream and niche knowledge production processes and knowledges. Thirdly, the YFP should continue to sustain,

maintain and build new networks across multiple cohorts, a range of institutions and multiple city actors. This would enrich the process of learning, contribute to niche knowledge production and establish a foundation for sustaining the “collective”. Fourthly, strengthening of the alumni network and creating processes of support for fellows would enable contributing to the unfolding process of “pathways to action”. Finally, the present TISS accreditation process should be leveraged to create deliberative processes to ensure that the original foundational principles of the programme remain undiluted. This would require negotiations, discussions and debates; a process that is to be encouraged. The TISS moment needs to be explored to examine the ways in which the foundational principles of the YFP are operationalised through a much wider, expansive learning template.

## MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

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### Knowledge

We aimed to understand how PUKAR's YFP has responded to the goal of making research accessible to Mumbai's marginalised residents, affirming local knowledge and knowledge of marginalised groups, opening alternate avenues for learning in contrast to standardised classrooms/course-based pedagogy, and creating space for democratic engagement. We also wanted to review PUKAR's efforts to accredit the programme and partner with colleges and NGOs. We experienced a handful of challenges. Interviews ran longer than expected, resulting in subsequent research stages taking longer time. We navigated these challenges by adjusting our schedules and sharing responsibilities carefully. During our participant observations, we had to negotiate how to differentiate between being “judgemental/subjective” and “observational.” We made a few changes to our research design. Instead of conducting life history interviews of alumni of the programme, we conducted regular in-depth interviews. This is because we wanted to understand the programme's impact and gather insights from every year of the programme (see the section on our research methodology). We also conducted brief email-based interviews with people associated with PUKAR about the programme in formal and informal ways.

### Capacities

We aimed to strengthen and mobilise the team's capacities primarily through workshops to get sustained and focused time on particular tasks or skills. The following table gives a glimpse of multiple pathways leveraged to build internal research capacities.

Table 3: Building internal research capacities

Facilitators	Engagement	Capacities Strengthened
Dr Amita Bhide	Day-long workshop with the research team/YFP team and a follow-up meeting two months after the workshop	Data analysis, data display, allocating work within the team, time management and critical thinking skills
Dr Anant Maringanti and Prasad Shetty	Day-and-a-half-long workshop with the research team/YFP team	Creating data sets, data analysis, data display, allocating work within the team, time management and critical thinking skills
Chetan Waghe	Day-long workshop with the research team and fellows from the 2021–22 batch	Knowledge about welfare schemes and steps to access them
YF/research team	Two-day-long workshops with the YF/ research team focused on the research process. This was facilitated by different YF/research team members	Analysis, discussion, writing and podcast production workshop to bring the project to a healthy conclusion

Source: Compiled by authors

One challenge we faced was managing multiple projects and commitments. This affected our ability to make collaborative decisions and discuss capacity-related growth in the first half of our research journey. In the next half, we paid closer attention to capacity-related strengthening and began sharing responsibilities more carefully.

We, as a team, devoted ourselves to honing our writing, interviewing, editing and voice skills. With the exception of one member, none of us had prior experience working on a podcast. The task of summarising reports for the website proved invaluable in strengthening our ability to synthesise information and improve our writing skills. We also engaged in activities such as transcribing, reading, coding, analysis and writing, which mobilised and enhanced our collective skill set. Through in-depth discussions and reflections on the programme and its future, we effectively tapped into the researchers' knowledge. Additionally, by reviewing books published by former YFP team members, we gained valuable insights into the programme. We were pleasantly surprised by the unplanned but useful increase in our knowledge about the programme and we greatly appreciated this opportunity.

## Outputs and Sharing

Our goal was to share our findings with research participants, the wider PUKAR team and others through a website, illustrated curriculum and a podcast. Our outputs can be accessed through the website [rediscovermumbai.pukar.org.in/](https://rediscovermumbai.pukar.org.in/). For the podcast series, all episodes except one are in Hindi and are edited for brevity. The website is designed to be updated yearly with new reports written by fellows.

We presented our findings at two academic conferences<sup>2</sup> and will submit the paper for publication in an academic journal in 2023. The research paper will offer researchers and NGO practitioners detailed insights about a programme on CBPAR and the pedagogical frame could then be accessible to a wider audience.

## People and Relationships

We hoped to strengthen and forge new relationships through this research project. We learned more about each other within the research team by spending time after work and during residential workshops. We have tried to strengthen working relationships within the team, research participants and external researchers with whom the team was connected before the project started. Review sessions after workshops and reflective sessions after interviews have helped us discuss several aspects of the programme, including ones that were seen as fundamental to the programme, such as the aspect of group work, the profile of fellows, the fellowship amount and structure, and more. One major challenge (and opportunity) is that the researchers are employed by the organisation that runs the programme under review. We found it difficult to reach members associated with the programme who had not had a positive experience. While deciding who to interview among the former facilitators, we heard a team member say, *"That person may not agree to speak with us"*. However, interviewing that person was vital to understand the programme and its evolution along with our other research questions. We discussed this problem and reaffirmed a commitment to write our critical review and views about the programme. We have included three new members who work at PUKAR in the research group to account for the workload in transcribing interviews, organising archival documents and more. We also contacted former fellows to assist us with these tasks.

## Legacies

We intended to gain critical insights into various aspects of the programme and the extent to which the YFP has achieved its stated goals over time. We also aimed to make our curriculum accessible and establish connections with NGOs/colleges for its use within the incumbent institutional frameworks. With respect to practice, we hope our project introduces a nudge towards how research can be taught with:

- Attention to inequalities
- Politics behind choosing a research question
- Use of unique pedagogy involving experiential, whole body learning and reflection
- Importance of acting on research findings to create social transformation

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<sup>2</sup> Comparative Education Society of India Annual Conference, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, 9–11 December 2022 and the Urban ARC 2023 | Cities in Flux IIHS Annual Research Conference, Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bengaluru, 12–14 January 2023.

- Importance of ethics while conducting research
- Exploring questions of who owns research findings and the role of research participants in the research process

In terms of policies, we hope to discuss our findings with colleges and NGOs/civil society organisations (CSOs) to explore possibilities of informing how research is taught and its utility. The curriculum on CBPAR can be deployed in different settings, including by colleges and NGOs.

Through our website, we have aimed to improve access to scholarship in Hindi, Marathi and English undertaken by underrepresented researchers and on under-researched topics through the website, with reports from fellows of the programme. Overall, the outputs/project has set the foundation for future advocacy work to make this model accessible in relevant contexts. We hope that our research offers PUKAR insights into the YF's journey since its inception.



## CONCLUSIONS

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This research assesses the usefulness of an urban educational intervention as a supplementary process to formal higher education system. This research also assesses the YFP in the context of “democratising” research and thereby making it accessible to all, particularly the marginalised youth and whether the YFP is a useful model to think about and act on the “urban” question.

Our research has emphasised that an urban education like the YFP is crucial towards enabling a research-oriented, problem-solving, individual-focused and action-oriented urban education. We argue that such processes are complementary processes to formal urban higher education and fills a gap towards making contemporary urban education more responsive to the urban challenges that exist. Programmes like the YFP need to be sustained, nurtured and expanded to ensure that the process of learning becomes an empowering process that enables creative, collective action to address discontinuities, disjunctions and dislocations in urban life.

In the end, the YFP model offers a unique perspective towards the form, structure and nature of urban education and emphasises that this model should be adopted as a complementary process in formal higher education.

Firstly, recognising critical gaps in contemporary higher education curriculum, this model ensures that key features of Indian urbanisation find recognition. These are dimensions of vulnerability, inequality, access to basic services, urban poverty and informal employment. There is a process through which knowledges are created about these dimensions and while these knowledges generate immediate evidence for appropriate policy action but, over a period of time, may generate substantial knowledges that may find space in the pedagogical processes of the existing higher education system. This effort, thus, should continue and would help in reorienting the higher education system towards proximate challenges of the urban and build meaningful capacities in the evolving urban context.

Secondly, this model ensures that there is a bridge that acts between the formal and the informal education system. This bridge is important because it facilitates two aspects: firstly, it ensures that there are strong feedback loops that exist in the learning ecosystem and secondly, it allows for practice knowledge to infiltrate the formal higher education system.

Thirdly, this model gives primacy to human agency as a transformative agenda. The YFP model ensures that core constitutional principles become the guiding framework of education and these are necessary to leverage the transformation potential of Indian cities towards addressing core development challenges. While the higher education system does recognise human agency as a core goal but the pedagogical processes and learning dynamics constrain uniformity in such an endeavour. It is, therefore, very important to ensure that a model like the YFP continues to give prominence to representation issues such as prioritising vulnerable and marginal youth to be YFP fellows.

Fourth, structurally this model is the best to demonstrate and act on the multiple interdependencies around many development agendas that exist in the urban. These may not be possible in discipline- and skill-focused higher education system in India. For example, a group of YFP fellows can pick up the challenges around healthcare and navigate the suite of development challenges around this.

Finally, it is important to recognise the process of learning as an iterative and dynamic process. These may entail multiple feedback loops, creation of new knowledge and proximity to localised development. Participatory processes are most suited in these contexts and are very powerful in terms of delivering on personal and context transformation agenda. While participatory processes are gradually finding spaces in a few higher education programmes, these may not find structured spaces in concrete ways. The YFP demonstrates that participatory processes of learning are deeply liberating and maybe powerful in terms of building human agency and creating a positive ecosystem for public action. These processes must, thus, continue. This stands in contrast to the end-line-oriented many professional and higher education programmes. Here, we are emphasising the importance of learning as a process and discovery and thereby, through participatory processes, equalising power, legitimising all local knowledge creation processes and giving primacy to human agency as a key agent that delivers transformation.

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## APPENDIX A

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### Archived projects: [rediscovermumbai.pukar.org.in](https://rediscovermumbai.pukar.org.in)

We created a microsite that contains summaries of research outputs created by alumni of the Youth Fellowship Program. Here are the titles of summaries that we have published so far:

तीन तलाक़ और उसपर मुस्लिम समाज का नजरिया (*Triple Talaq and the Perspective of the Muslim Community*) [Hindi]

रेल्वेकालगत लगत पालेभाज्या उत्पादन करणाऱ्या लोकांचे आर्थिक व मानसिक जीवन (*Economic and Psychological Life of People Producing Leafy Vegetables Adjacent to Railway Tracks*) [Marathi]

*Rediscovering Mumbai's Forgotten Poisar River* [English]

कर्जत विभाग कातकरी समाजातील मुलींचे बालविवाह (*Child Marriages of Katkari Community Girls of Karjat Division*) [Marathi]

*Problems faced by People due to Non-Functional Toilets in Jai Bhim Nagar, Powai* [English]

आउट ऑफ़ स्कूल विद्यार्थियों का अभ्यास, कुंचिकुर्वेनगर, धारावी (*Study on Out of School Students, Kunchikurve Nagar, Dharavi*) [Hindi]

## APPENDIX B

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Illustrated primer on the Youth Fellowship Program in Hindi accessible at [rediscovermumbai.pukar.org.in/curriculum/](https://rediscovermumbai.pukar.org.in/curriculum/)



## APPENDIX C

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Our podcast, "Rethinking Research", showcases interviews with academics, educationists/facilitators and researchers. Below is a description of the podcast:

How can research be done differently? Tune in to hear PUKAR's immersive conversations with practitioners for a balance of theory, practice and passion. We'll discuss action research, participatory research, feminist research, and more, along with how these terms are even defined and practically negotiated (Ambekar et al. 2022).

Each member of the research team chose guests to interview, conducted research about them and the wider topic, wrote questions, conducted the interview and suggested edits. Below are some of our episodes:

### 1) सहभागिता के मूल्य और रिसर्च (*Importance of Participation and Research*)

Nileema Ambekar and Arvind Sakat are in conversation with Anju Uppal and Prabir Bose who together are exploring "participatory theatre for cultural action." They have been facilitating workshops, devising theatre and film, and much more to challenge conventional assumptions of the developmental and academic sector and to instead encourage critical thinking and action through pedagogy. Their approach involves "engaging and enabling groups and communities as equal participants in research and documentation of processes not just enrich the learning and makes the exercise meaningful but is also a step towards social justice" (Vikalp Kriya, n.d.). They have been facilitating workshops for PUKAR since the early days of the YFP and share many insights about participatory processes and research.

### 2) Feminist Research and Questions of Privilege

Abhishek S is in conversation Reetika Revathy Subramaniam, a PhD scholar who is researching the links between early marriage, drought and labour migration in India. We discuss her negotiations with practising feminist values during her research. She worked with PUKAR for over a year in 2014, creating original content, facilitating workshops on writing and research and more.

### 3) रिसर्च खुद में और बस्तियों में बदलाव लाने का साधन (*Research as a Tool to Change the Self and Slums*)

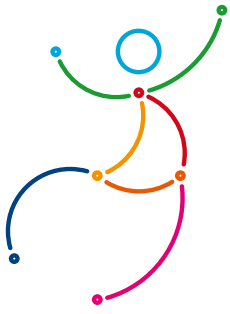
Vishal Patel is in conversation with Manisha Gangode, a researcher at Abhivyakti NGO. They discuss the power of research as a tool to learn about one's village, to collectivise and to take grounded action. She links change at the level of the self, to wider levels of her village and beyond. She was part of a community-based participatory action research course offered by PUKAR. PUKAR has worked with Abhivyakti over several years to implement and evolve the CBPAR model in the context of Nashik and rural areas close to Nashik.

#### 4) समुदाय आधारित रिसर्च और बदलाव की प्रक्रिया (*Process of Community Based Research and Transformation*)

Nileema Ambekar and Nagma Shah are in conversation with Professor Amita Bhide, Professor Mahesh Kamble and Avinash Kaur about urban action research. They have been pivotal in running the "M-East ward transformation". We discuss the difference between change and transformation, participation in the city's development plan, and capacity building concerning action research.

#### 5) एक्शन रिसर्च और उसका महत्व (*Action Research and its Importance*)

Nileema Ambekar and Nagma Shah are in conversation with Professor Amita Bhide, Simpreet and Avinash M about the role of action research during COVID-19 and the formulation of a vulnerability index. The three scholars have been pivotal in running the "M-East ward transformation".



# TE|SF

**TESF** is a GCRF funded Network Plus, coordinated out of the University of Bristol, working with partners in India, Rwanda, Somalia/Somaliland, South Africa the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

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