

# ALUMNI STORIES

Part III

## ***Titles***

Towards dignity of labour  
Community ownership of education  
Supporting higher education  
Role of men in gender issues  
Developing a just migration policy  
Towards sustainable development  
Creating a democratic school system  
Art as a way to develop life skills  
Café with a difference  
Women entrepreneurs retailing solar  
Resource rights of indigenous women  
Research on early literacy and language teaching  
Empowering youth through sports and art  
Towards improving living conditions  
Holistic development at Anganwadis  
Supporting change makers

## ***Alumni featured***

Himani Gautam  
Pradeep Kumar Singh  
Priya Singh  
Pravin Narayan Thote  
Eswari Krishnadas  
Shrishtee Bajpai  
Korhale Harshale Pramod  
Nagaraj Kulkarni  
Alina Alam  
Felix Varghese  
Vaishnavi Varadarajan  
Harshita V Das  
Anjali Mariam Paul  
Fauzia Nazneen  
Das Antoni Arokianathan S  
Vibha Sequeira

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**April, 2019**

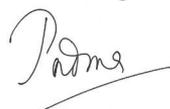
Dear Readers,

We continue the tradition of student volunteers from the Class of 2018-20 of the M.A. Education, M.A. Development, and M.A. Public Policy and Governance programmes shadowing Alumni in locations across the country, during their winter break. This project went beyond the story, interactions with Alumni at their work place helped our students visualize future careers and contextualize their education at the University. For the alumni, this was a great opportunity to meet a student face to face to get a first-hand account of what's happening at the University today. We hope to facilitate many more such connects in future, that bring us together.

In this edition, we have featured 16 Alumni Stories that give you a glimpse of what our Alumni is engaged with. As the community grows, this is a source of information for those who would like to connect with others working on similar issues, perhaps in different contexts. This time, we have included their email ids for you to get in touch with them.

Ending with a big shout out to the enthusiastic team of student volunteers, your enthusiasm made this possible! And to our Alumni out there, thank you for sharing, your stories do us proud.

Warm regards,



**Padma Nayar**

*Alumni Office, Azim Premji University*

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2015-17

**M.A. Development**

*Towards dignity of labour*

“

***Being a development professional is about inculcating an understanding of questioning existing socio economic conditions around and looking at it with a solution oriented approach.”***



## **Himani Gautam**

Himani Gautam graduated from Azim Premji University with a degree in M.A. Development in 2017. She always wanted to work on projects focused on livelihood generation. Himani got placed through campus placement as a Project Coordinator with the Training and Quality department of a social enterprise empanelled with National Skill Development Corporation in Delhi. She developed a programme evaluation framework through which she monitored and evaluated trainings conducted on a pan India level.

Himani has been actively working on adult literacy, sessions for girls on health and sanitation, financial literacy and encouraging students to take up what they are

passionate about. The participants in her programmes are from underprivileged sections of semi urban and rural areas across the country.

She currently works with the research team of National Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs in Delhi. Himani actively advocates for dignity of labour in India.

- Himani Gautam can be reached on [himani.gautam15@apu.edu.in](mailto:himani.gautam15@apu.edu.in)

2014-16

**M.A. Education**

*Community ownership of education*

“

***Public education incorporates the aims of education from various points of view; what it means for a Nation, for a community, for a parent, and for a child, considering all have different notions and experiences.”***



## **Pradeep Kumar Singh**

Pradeep Kumar Singh is currently working as a Programme Manager in National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) in the Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh. His responsibilities are framing, implementing and improving education policies under the project by NITI Aayog under which 117 most backward districts in India have been identified as aspirational. In these districts, non-governmental organization's and the administration are working together - his key stakeholders are the District Magistrate and the Education Department. In the last year, Pradeep has launched two programmes - Vidyadaan and Bal Mela. The Vidyadaan programme aims to reduce the widening gap between government officials and the community. Bal Mela, a children's festival programme tries to bring in community

feeling between schools.

Prior to Bahraich, Pradeep worked in Jhunjhunu district of Rajasthan on capacity building of DIET faculty through workshops, developing a professional community, exposure visits and action research. After working for 2 years in Jhunjhunu district, Pradeep feels proud that it has been placed second in the country by the National Achievement Survey 2017, in learning outcomes. Pradeep is a votary of the public education system and believes that change will come only with community ownership.

- Pradeep Kumar Singh can be reached at [pradeep.singh14@apu.edu.in](mailto:pradeep.singh14@apu.edu.in)

2012-14

**M.A. Development**

*Supporting higher education*

“

***I realized the importance of theoretical frameworks we studied at University after I started working with the government; you need a theoretical base when it comes to policy formation.”***



**Priya Singh**

Priya worked as a human rights activist in Kashmir post her Bachelor's in Social Work. After completion of the M.A. Development Priya joined the Haryana Education Department as a research fellow where she worked towards enhancing the quality of education in 15000 government schools. She worked there for 2 years, after which she joined the CSR department of Bharati Airtel Limited where she worked at the ground level in government schools of Delhi.

Currently, Priya works with the Rashtriya Uchchatar Siksha Abhiyan (RUSA), a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), and a flagship programme under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) launched in 2013 which aims to

strengthen the Higher Education Policy and implementation in India through research, for better attainment of the goals of access, equity and excellence in the select state universities and colleges by providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions. She is a consultant, working extensively in the states of Punjab, Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh. She is part of the Technical Support Group in the implementation of this scheme. Through her work, she fulfils her passion for working on the ground and being a part of the policy making structure.

- Priya Singh can be reached at [priya.singh@apu.edu.in](mailto:priya.singh@apu.edu.in)

2014-16

M.A. Development

Role of men in gender issues

“

*Men have been seen as part of the problem by all concerned, but unless they are seen as part of the solution, can we really address the root cause of the 'gender problem'?"*



## Pravin Narayan Thote

Pravin works as a Programme Coordinator in Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA), Mumbai. After completing his graduation, he joined the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University, with a vague plan for his future. He believes that the two years at University were life changing for him.

Men Against Violence and Abuse is working towards building a movement that explores the role of men as 'partners' and 'stakeholders' in addressing gender issues through cultural advocacy, direct intervention and youth education initiatives. Through MAVA, Pravin has been engaging young men in schools, colleges and communities in healthy conversations around sexual health and gender-sensitive behaviour through leadership-driven training and using out-of-the box methods

including interactive workshops, annual magazine, street-theatre and film-festivals. He is currently working on several projects and one of his recent workshops was on 'Sexual harassment at workplace of women'. He also works with youth and is currently focusing on a travelling film festival. The target group of this festival is young men and women studying in colleges / universities and aims to develop a gender-just perspective among the youth and help them reflect their biases, prejudices and regressive attitudes towards any gender. The festival would provide a safe, non-threatening platform to ventilate differences and celebrate diversity in Gender.

- Pravin Narayan Thote can be reached at [pravin.thote14@apu.edu.in](mailto:pravin.thote14@apu.edu.in)

“

*The courage and tenacity shown by migrants and refugees that I met as a part of my grassroots work, in the face of increasing xenophobia and injustice, continues to inspire me.”*



## Eswari Krishnadas

Eswari Krishnadas works as a Policy Analyst at the Centre for Indian Migrant Studies, Kerala (CIMS Kerala) and Research Associate at Migrant Forum in Asia. Her work includes policy analysis and research for advocacy efforts on migrant and human rights. This involves collaborating and continuous engagement with civil society, trade unions and governments within Asia in capacity building and awareness. She provides consultancy on improving and developing an inclusive, fair and just migration policy. She says her work further involves analysing international and domestic political processes regarding migration and discovering gaps and opportunities with input from grassroots level organizations.

Eswari has been part of background operations of a television show run by CIMS Kerala on missing and trapped migrants from Kerala in the Middle East wherein using their networks, they are able to locate and repatriate the migrant. Currently, she is mainly involved in case and policy analysis, research efforts and creating policy documents for advocacy efforts for network members. The academic rigour and scope of courses in the M.A. Public Policy and Governance programme has helped her develop solid and coherent evidence-based research and policy writing for governmental consultations as well as capacity building on the field.

- Eswari Krishnadas can be reached at [eswari.krishnadas15@apu.edu.in](mailto:eswari.krishnadas15@apu.edu.in)

2013-15

**M.A. Development**

*Towards sustainable development*

“

***Sustainable development requires ingenuity. People are the most important resource for this.”***



## **Shrishtee Bajpai**

As part of the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University, the course 'Ecological Justice in India' deeply impacted Shrishtee and she began to think of working for an environmental cause. She started work with People's Science Institute, an non-governmental organization in Dehradun who promotes natural resource management, conservation biology, and sustainable development.

To broaden the canvas, Shrishtee then joined Kalpavriksh Environment Action Group, a Pune based non-profit organization working on environmental and social issues at local, national and global levels. Kalpavriksh initiated a process called 'Vikalp Sangam' (alternative confluence) in 2014 that aims to bring together practitioners, thinkers, researchers, and others working on alternatives to currently dominant forms of economic development and political governance. The process

believes that while resistance efforts are underway, and need to be supported, there is also a need to create a cross sectoral platform on alternatives (or constructive work) to share, learn, build hope, and for collaboration. Shrishtee helps in documentation of some such initiatives in Kalpavriksh and helps in coordinating the Vikalp Sangam process.

Shrishtee believes that spreading and incorporating the idea of 'Meaningful Development' is not an easy task but not impossible though. She does not complain about very little participation of the government rather believes that people themselves will take such initiatives in a truly democratic way.

- Shrishtee Bajpai can be reached at [shrishtee.bajpai13@apu.edu.in](mailto:shrishtee.bajpai13@apu.edu.in)

2013-15

**M.A. Education**

*Creating a democratic school system*

“

***We need a more conducive environment for democratic and egalitarian discourses of education.”***



## **Korhale Harshale Pramod**

Harshal currently works with the Holy Child School. Before this, he has been actively involved in the field of education as part of an eminent non-governmental organization. With the expertise he gained on large scale interventions and the top-down approach to education, he wanted to explore and work closely with the ultimate stakeholders of the education system - students, teachers and parents.

At school, Harshal has diverse and demanding set of roles and responsibilities, be it capacity building, curriculum development or teaching, he is passionately involved. His goal is to contribute to the development of the social science curriculum and pedagogy in India. Harshal finds a gap between the curricular framework and on-ground needs of children. To bridge this gap, a host of after school programmes

like 'Being Learner', 'Learning Mela' and 'Summer Mela' are conducted to address needs of contemporary education.

To understand the education sector, Harshal believes one must work in a school; he credits his professor at the University for initiating this thought. For him, as School Coordinator, the egalitarian and democratic systems he was part of at the University are a benchmark for many of his decisions today. The diversity of people, culture and ideology he experienced at the University were ideal to inculcate liberty, patience and sensitivity which are essential parts of his goal as an educator.

- Korhale Harshale Pramod can be reached at [pramod.korhale13@apu.edu.in](mailto:pramod.korhale13@apu.edu.in)

2015-17

**M.A Development**

*Art as a way to develop life skills*

“

***I am going back to public school,  
with the most creative solution  
that I can.”***



## **Nagaraj Kulkarni**

Nagaraj after his programme at Azim Premji University, joined Enabling Leadership at Dharwad. He worked with the aim of developing capabilities of rural children. His interest in working with discovering the potential of children and his competency in working with them developed.

Currently, Nagaraj is the Programme Coordinator at Artsparks Foundation, Bangalore, which aims to support the development of 21st century learning and life skills in children using the medium of visual art and design. It also supports the professional development of classroom teachers, encouraging them to reflect on their teaching practice, and explore new ways to enrich student learning.

The Foundation presently works with 2000 children of 20 schools in and around Bangalore, mostly Government schools and schools for the underprivileged. Nagaraj mediates between the schools and the organization, manages stakeholders, recruits facilitators and maintains the quality of programmes.

Nagaraj has multiple roles and responsibilities of advocating a better childhood for underprivileged children, he dreams of a special school with creative education and activity based learning.

- Nagaraj Kulkarni can be reached at [nagaraj.kulkarni15@apu.edu.in](mailto:nagaraj.kulkarni15@apu.edu.in)

2015-17

**M.A. Development**

*Café with a difference*

“

***By engaging persons with disability we believe that they would act as agents of change by example and thereby promote a system of self-sustenance and wellness through our livelihood development initiative.”***



**Alina Alam**

Alina Alam founded Mitti Café in 2017 as a platform for adults with physical, intellectual and multiple disabilities to showcase their abundant potential for productive activity, and create awareness for the cause of equal opportunities in employment. What started at Hubli in a tin shed with an employee in a wheelchair, has grown to 8 Mitti Cafés in Karnataka, engaging 54 differently abled employees mostly from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who have either dropped out of, or never attended school.

Mitti Cafés, through its ongoing efforts at sensitizing the public to inclusion, hopes to spur like-minded institutions to build systems of development that adopt an inclusive and holistic approach. Today, these Cafés are supported by Infosys,

Australia New Zealand Bank and Quintiles/IQVIA; more cafés are coming up at Accenture, Wipro, Wells Fargo and Ernst and Young. Alina plans to expand to other cities and create inclusive modular cafés, the design and culture of which could be adopted globally.

Mitti Café is presently incubated at NSRCEL-IIM Bangalore and supported by Deshpande Foundation in Hubli. In the last 18 months, Alina and Mitti Café have won awards like the Microsoft Nipman Award, Tiecon Young female Entrepreneur of the Year award, Promising Social Enterprise Award from Manish Sisodia, Deputy CM of Delhi and so on.

- Alina Alam can be reached at [alina.alam14@apu.edu.in](mailto:alina.alam14@apu.edu.in)

“

**Setting up a network of female entrepreneurs has been challenging in the face of community stereotypes.”**



## Felix Varghese

Felix works as an Assistant Project Manager in the flagship initiative Solar Urja through Localization for Sustainability (SoULS), spearheaded by IIT Bombay. The initiative aims at empowering and creating female entrepreneurs by helping them set up retail outlets that promote and provide solar products such as lamps, stove cookers, etc. Through this initiative, a two-fold change is envisioned - providing a sustainable and clean alternative through solar products that require low maintenance, as well as entrenching female leadership in communities.

Felix had always been inclined to working on field and through the project works with various stakeholders on ground. He felt that Azim Premji University, not only

nurtured him for academia but helped him to deliver that knowledge on the ground. He believes it helped him to understand the nuances that enhanced his experience when working with various stakeholders. This knowledge has allowed him to carefully work around the various stereotypes that he faces from the community while working with women. Felix has been coordinating micro enterprise development in solar products in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam. So far, his efforts have been successful in creating more than 100 women entrepreneurs who are now in the early phases of setting up their own retail businesses.

- Felix Varghese can be reached at [felix.varghese@apu.edu.in](mailto:felix.varghese@apu.edu.in)

2015-17

**M.A. Development**

*Resource rights of indigenous women*

“

***As development practitioners, our work should not be towards raising our voices, but furthering and amplifying the voices of the people we are working for.”***



## **Vaishnavi Varadarajan**

Vaishnavi works as a Research and Programme Associate in Dhaatri Resource Centre for Women and Children's Rights, which works with adivasi women on safeguarding their resource rights, in the context of increasing land grabbing and acquisition of indigenous areas for development projects such as mining, industrial corridors and tourism. Her work through Dhaatri involves conducting action research to understand how women are impacted by environment violations, capacity building of women human rights defenders, facilitating discussions on environment laws such as FRA and PESA, and advocacy and networking on a local, national and international level.

Recently, one of the human rights defenders who she works with was invited to

speak at the UN Business and Human Rights Forum on how mining affected women from Rajasthan are impacted due to water contamination and air pollution. She considers this to be a proud moment in her work, and mentions that her work has strengthened her own learnings on the intersections between feminism and ecological justice.

Vaishnavi believes that the foundation for her work was built in Azim Premji University. Her understanding on environment advocacy was built through her time working in coastal areas of Karnataka through her Law and Governance course.

- Vaishnavi Varadarajan can be reached at [vaishnavi.varadarajan15@apu.edu.in](mailto:vaishnavi.varadarajan15@apu.edu.in)

2012-14

**M.A. Education**

*Research on early literacy and language teaching*

“

*Everyone should simply go out and do what their calling is and in doing so one might indeed make a meaningful difference, no matter how small that could be.”*



**Harshita V Das**

Harshita is a Project Co-ordinator for the Early Literacy Initiative (ELI) anchored at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad. Her focus is on the Madras Presidency Chapter of the Socio-Historical Study that aims to understand the influence of the Protestant Missionaries on the early literacy and language teaching and learning practices and policies prevalent in Colonial Madras Presidency. Her work at ELI involves extensive research, which includes identifying and analysing of both primary archival and secondary sources. This includes looking closely into language textbooks, primers, teacher education material, teacher journals, government records to name a few. This study will help contextualise current policies and practices that are prevalent in schools across the country, and also help

us understand the socio-cultural-historical aspects that helped shaped the same. Harshita hopes that the study given its vast and detailed nature will be able to effect current policy in some way.

Harshita also supports the ELI team with networking, advocacy and dissemination efforts. She helps in the production of practitioner friendly resources such as handouts to help teachers / practitioners with best practices for Early Language and Literacy learning, on a regular basis, and also works on their domain building efforts as they maintain a blog space with contributions from practitioners.

- Harshita V Das can be reached at [harshita.das@apu.edu.in](mailto:harshita.das@apu.edu.in)

2015-17

M.A. Development

Empowering youth through sports and art

“

*My work over the past two years has cemented the notion that the well-needed political narrative of the hour is education. Not the education that talks about academic achievement but the education that prepares you to work together as a team, think creatively, take initiative, manage conflicts, follow instructions, overcome challenges and find solutions to problems.”*



## Anjali Mariam Paul

An architect by training, Anjali's journey in education began by teaching children English in the squatter settlements of Jaipur, Rajasthan. At the University, once she discovered her love for academic writing and research, Anjali has never looked back and has written pieces advocating for street vendors, sex workers, Assam's river islanders and educational reforms by contributing to various publications, including Space and Culture, International Health Policies, Ideas for India, eSocialSciences and YouthKiAwaaz.

Anjali currently heads the Strategic Writing & Communication vertical for Thought Leadership at Dream a Dream. Dream a Dream believes in empowering young

people from vulnerable backgrounds to overcome adversity and flourish in a fast changing world. They achieve this by building the life skills of young people, through the medium of sports and art. Anjali is part of the team that uses the evidence from the organization's programmes to advocate for the urgency and criticality of life skills in the Indian context. She disseminates evidence through working on content for articles, papers, reports and newsletters, which are strategically geared towards different stakeholders like policy makers, academicians, educators, parents and other thought leaders in the same space.

- Anjali Mariam Paul can be reached at [anjali.paul15@apu.edu.in](mailto:anjali.paul15@apu.edu.in)

2013-15

**M.A. Development**

*Towards improving living conditions*

“

*In my work, satisfaction comes from understanding people and their aspirations.”*



**Fauzia Nazneen**

Fauzia Nazneen works at Micro Housing Finance Corporation Limited (MHFC) in Mumbai. The organization provides housing finance for lower-income households, mostly for those working in the informal sector, in urban centres and also provides home construction loans in rural and semi-urban areas in India.

After having had diverse experiences through her internships and courses at Azim Premji University, Fauzia began to realize that a large part of the nation still lives in despicable living conditions that are beneath human dignity, which is the cornerstone in the idea of development. As a credit officer, Fauzia regularly meets clients in order to understand them and assess their credibility to repay loans on offer. This keeps her grounded and informed of the realities and aspirations of her

customers. While the approval of a loan helps these customers possess their dream home, she feels like a medium of spreading joy and satisfaction. She has been working in the financial space for about three and a half years now and currently heads the Credit Risk Analysis department in MHFC.

Two years at the University has not only empowered her with knowledge but with great life learnings like it is never too late to do something totally new. Despite being from a social science background, the University gave her the strength and determination to explore the financial space but with a touch of social flavour to it! She continues to work with the passion to make a difference.

- Fauzia Nazneen can be reached at [fauzia.nazneen13@apu.edu.in](mailto:fauzia.nazneen13@apu.edu.in)

2015-17

**M.A. Development**

*Holistic development at Anganwadis*

“

***The goal is for communities to take over, and for the organization to withdraw after three years.”***



## **Das Antoni Arokianathan S**

Antoni joined Makkala Jagriti, Bangalore to head their Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme. Having joined as the 23rd employee of Makkala Jagriti, Antoni now heads a team of 30 people working across 92 anganwadi centres in Bangalore (Urban and Rural). The ECE programme at Makkala Jagriti works on capacity building for anganwadi teachers, towards children's school preparedness. The ECE programme follows the International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) framework for a holistic assessment of their work. Antoni notes with pride that officials from Save the Children (who produced the IDELA framework) chose to study Makkala Jagriti's ECE programme for a paper to be presented at the CIES Conference in San Francisco this year.

An interesting initiative undertaken in Doddaballapur is the 'Hubcenter' - a learning

resource centre which connects a few anganwadis in the area. Children from each anganwadi, accompanied by their teacher, make scheduled visits to the hubcenters to work on different zones of development, using local materials and with a different innovative theme for each week. Antoni reports that the visiting anganwadi workers implement the lesson plans from the hubcenter at their anganwadis, and their success at engaging and enhancing children's social, emotional and cognitive development has motivated their peers too, to take initiative. The hubcenter has a strong value of community ownership, and is run with the involvement of the Bal Vikas Samitis and Panchayat officials.

- Das Antoni Arokianathan S can be reached at [dasantoni.samuel15@apu.edu.in](mailto:dasantoni.samuel15@apu.edu.in)

2012-14

**M.A. Education**

*Supporting change makers*

“

*The thing that keeps me going is that we are in a position to support the people who are making the change happen.”*



## Vibha Sequeira

With a background in technology, Vibha worked at Wipro for twelve years before embarking on her journey into the social sector. She began this foray by volunteering with an organization working to support persons with disability, where she discovered that social problems are complex and cannot be solved merely through money, processes, and troubleshooting as is the common misconception held by many in corporate roles.

After graduating from Azim Premji University, Vibha rejoined Wipro to build a programme for students with disabilities, and went on to be the Managing Trustee at Wipro Cares. Wipro Cares is a trust set up in 2003 to respond to the desire of employees to give back to society. It supports projects for education of

underprivileged children, including children with disabilities, primary health care, community ecology, and disaster rehabilitation.

In 2018, Vibha stepped down as Managing Trustee to assume the mantle of Head of Operations of Wipro Foundation, which enables organizations working in education, ecology, and community care programmes, to run on their own passion and expertise. With the certainty that her niche lay not in the frontline but in the background, Vibha finds reward in supporting and enabling partner organizations to produce positive outcomes on the field.

- Vibha Sequeira can be reached at [vibha.sequeira@apu.edu.in](mailto:vibha.sequeira@apu.edu.in)



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*Towards a just, equitable,  
humane and sustainable society*