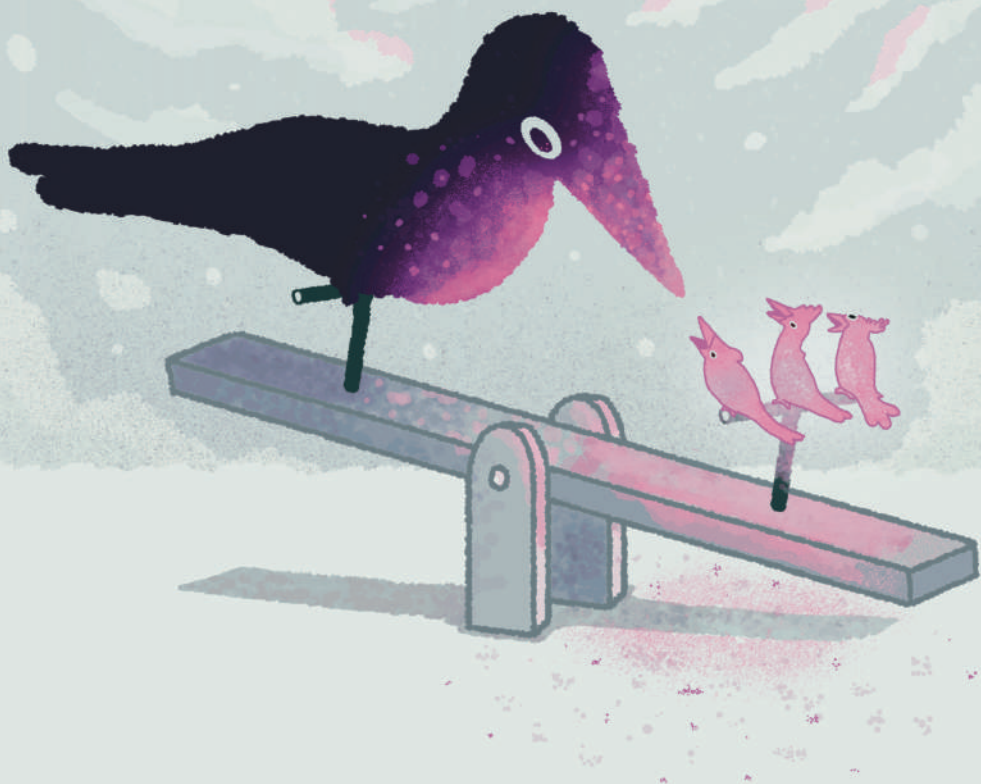


ISSUE # 1

Justice makers





Justice Makers

Stories of young people solving justice issues differently.
Curated by Agami, in collaboration with The Alipore Post.

Agami is a movement of ideas and people seeking to transform the experience of justice in India. Agami believes that the only way to radically improve our collective experience is if millions of citizens go beyond merely seeking justice to creating solutions that make justice a reality for themselves and for their communities.

Tammanna Aurora Story Weaver, Editor, Writer (Agami)
Rohini Kejriwal Art Director, Editor, Artist (The Alipore Post)
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Printed at Kolorkode, Bangalore, India | August 2022

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to seed

an idea

Every few years, how we view the world and feel about our lives changes. It took me ten stories, ten months and countless conversations to start to understand how our ideas of justice are changing.

I found that the word justice takes on different meanings depending on who we are and where we come from. Today, justice extends far beyond legal disputes and courtrooms.

Justice is made when a community gathers at the village *chabutra* to fight for their land rights. When a law student helps you resolve a three year old dispute over a 15 minute phone call. When not just lawyers but everyone is able to understand a legal document. When the young and the old come together to save their beloved forests.

It is made when we learn how to work with local authorities and processes, deal with imperfect information, mobilise resources, create awareness and find just solutions.

In piecing together this new idea of justicemaking, I met people who are thoughtful, who have taken the time to understand what the real problems around us are and why our old methods of doing things are no longer applicable today.

These are people who are starting to see the world around us differently. They are not the ones that make the world go round. **They make the world go forward.**

In each of their stories are common threads of agency, identity, belonging, care and curiosity – a range of human emotions and capacities that feed into how we live our lives.

And to make visible these human emotions at play, we turned to art. The text and the visual language gave us a way to situate ourselves in the sites of justicemaking and see the possibilities created by our shifting worldview.

Collectively, these stories reflect our learnings (**legal issues are not the only kind of justice issues**), what makes us feel confident (***main kisi ki madad karne layak ban gayi hoon / I have become someone who is capable of helping others***) and what keeps us going (**I am learning life skills that are useful in any situation**).

In reading about them, you might agree with the poet Mary Oliver that these are people who are doing something altogether different from the ordinary. Their work does not refute the ordinary. It is, simply, something else. Its labour requires a different outlook – a different set of priorities.

– Tammanna Aurora, Story Weaver at Agami

There is no
linear approach
to problem solving.

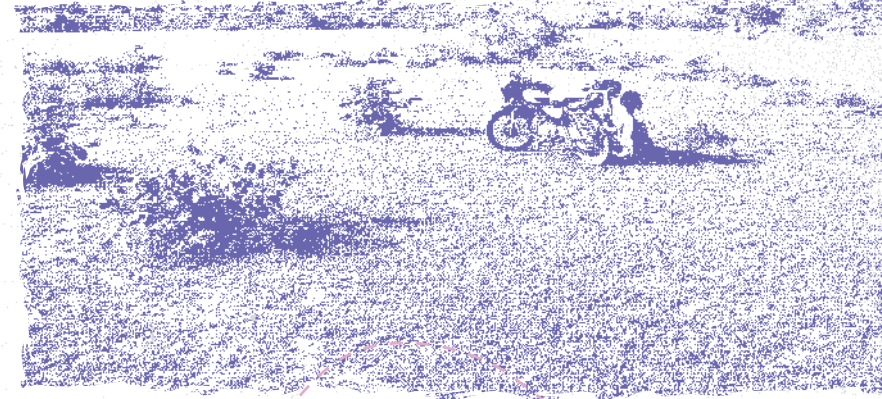
— Abhay Jain

field notes from zenith

WORDS AND IMAGES BY AYERA CHOUDHARY
& TAMMANNA AURORA · ART BY ROHINI KEJRIWAL



Abhay Jain and Swapnil Shukla, founders of
Zenith - Society for Socio - Legal Empowerment



In the early days of Zenith, Abhay and Swapnil travelled around different villages in parts of Madhya Pradesh to understand the ground realities and issues people faced, and make sense of why old methods of solving them were not working.

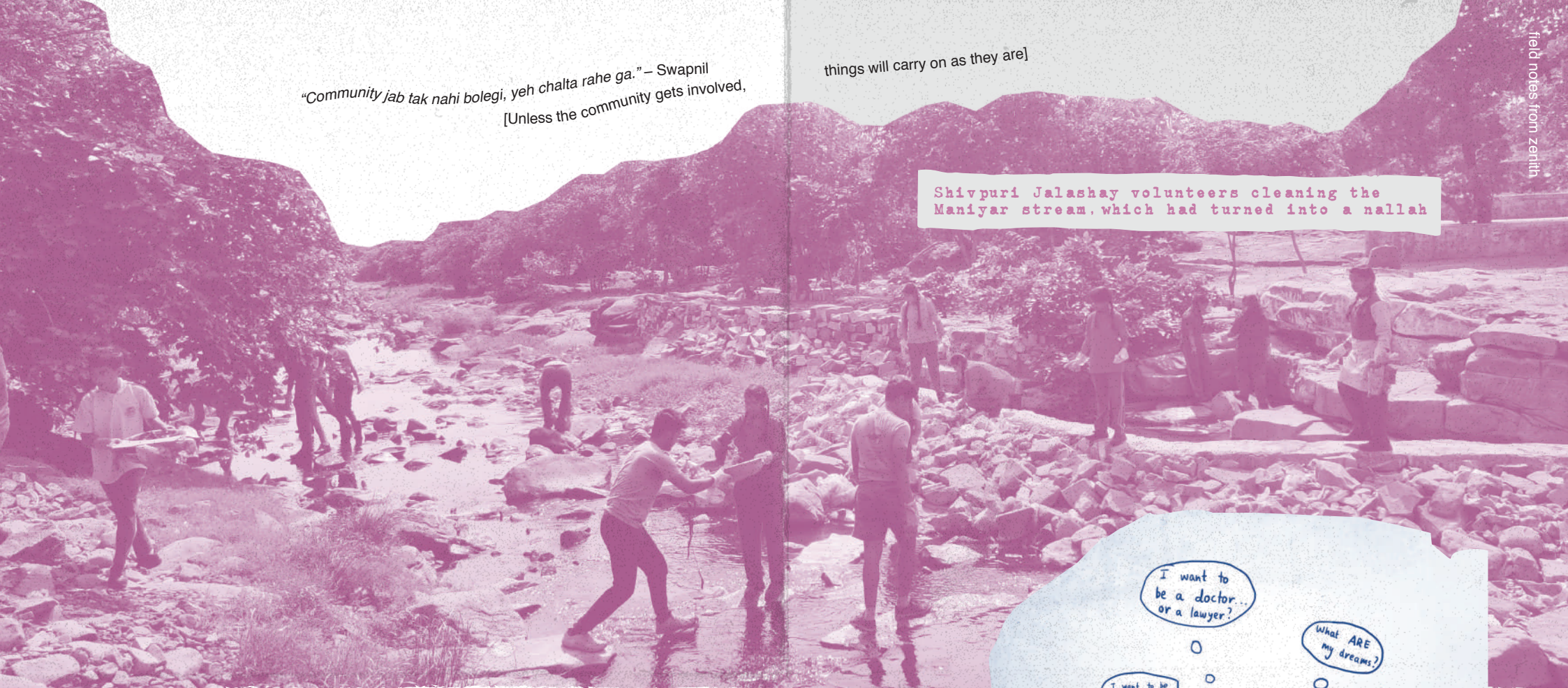
They arrived at two big learnings:

1. There is a lack of affordable and quality legal services at the grassroots level. People need safe spaces to ask questions, learn about their rights and find solutions to their justice issues.
2. Justice cannot be carried on the shoulders of one person or institution. Multiple stakeholders need to participate in decisions that affect their lives and livelihood, and the youth need to be at the heart of it.

"Community jab tak nahi bolegi, yeh chalta rahe ga." – Swapnil
[Unless the community gets involved,

things will carry on as they are]

Shivpuri Jalashay volunteers cleaning the Maniyar stream, which had turned into a nallah



It all started in third year of law school after a particularly inspiring class on Public Interest Litigation (PIL). Abhay thought he had found a solution for protecting the *magar* (crocodile) and the lakes in his hometown of Shivpuri, which were covered in a blanket of polythene.

A PIL was filed, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) gave favourable orders, the news was celebrated in the local media and then... nothing happened. Nothing changed! The lakes were not magically cleaned up. It didn't take long to see that court orders don't matter unless they are implemented. So they called for local participation, got together and cleaned the lake themselves!

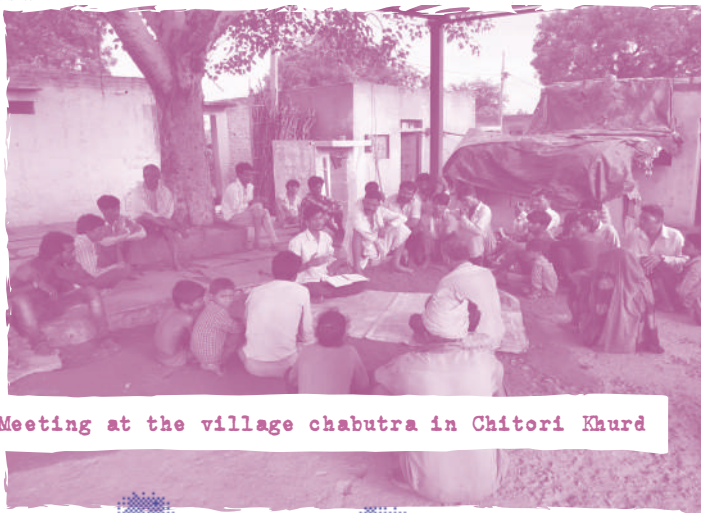


Dreams from Malanpur

Zenith's role has never been to tell people how to solve their problems, or to solve it for them. Instead, in places like Shivpuri and Gwalior, they create spaces where Adivasi, Dalit and other marginalised communities feel safe to express themselves without hesitation. Spaces to voice their concerns and share their stories on their own terms. Spaces for them to dream.

But what does a space to dream look like for these communities?

By meeting communities in neutral spaces, Zenith encourages people to reach out to them for support and helps them feel a sense of agency in articulating their problems.



Meeting at the village chabutra in Chitori Khurd



Kamal Sahariya, a Sahariya Adivasi woman, came to Zenith to get her SC/ST certificate made because she wanted to stand for local elections.



Sameer *bhai*, a Sahariya Adivasi from Dholagarh, waded through the justice system to finally access his land rights in a case that had been pending for 20 years. The fact that he has understood how to access the system on his own and fight for his rights creates a sense of agency within him. It's so strong that it ripples through the other 172 Sahariya Adivasi families struggling with pending land cases, who now know that there is a way out and have found a leader in Sameer *bhai*.

In Mudkheda, the community has been actively voicing concerns about a check-post proposed by the government that would hinder their community rights to freely access the forests and till their land.



A scene from Mudkheda with community leader Rajendra bhai (far right)

Documenting life in Shivpuri while interning with

Ayera: I can either point and shoot with my camera and simplify peoples complex identities and problems with my direct questions or I can hold space for them to tell their story. I have come to realise that no community owes you access to their issues. We owe them our patience and commitment; and through time, build trust and accountability.

It's hard because we are taught law in the semantics of heavy hardbound books, spun by Latin phrases and *Yes Your Lordships*. Our knowledge systems do not account for the discomfort of holding two opposing truths and just sitting with them.



In Majera, the *khadaan* (quarries) have taken the lives of many members of the community due to silicosis, giving it the name *Randon ka Gaon* (Village of Widows). These waters are the same ones the children jump in, with absolute untethered joy.

When asked why they continue to work there, the locals reply, "*Jab kuch aur kaam hi nahi hai, toh aadmi kya kare? Roti paani toh chahiye na?*" [When there is no other work, what are we to do? We have to earn our livelihood.]

They choose to go back to what kills them because it is the only option they have. How do you sit with a truth like that? Is it even my story to tell?

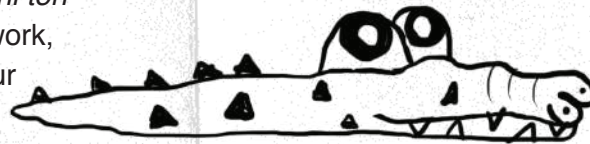
Zenith, I have more questions than answers.

As Abhay and Swapnil say, there are no linear solutions and it doesn't help to address problems in binaries with labels like 'oppressor/oppressed'. People from both sides have to be part of the conversation to create new structures and try a new approach to justicemaking. And for that to happen, we need to hold space for these difficult conversations and navigate the politics of space together.

Even though the waters of change
will be full of contradictions,



we too can be like the cow in Sankhya Sagar,
sitting with the *magar* (crocodile) of injustice
and let it see us unfettered and unmoved, taking up space.



I think justice is
a feeling of being
restored to your
personhood, to
your human self.

— Disha Wadekar

why we show up

WORDS BY TAMMANNA AURORA · ART BY SHRUJANA SHRIDHAR

In 1871, the British government passed the Criminal Tribes Act and in one piece of legislation, over 200 tribes were classified as 'criminal tribes' and an entire community of people were criminalised at birth. The law was subsequently repealed in 1952 and these tribes came to be known as 'Denotified Tribes'.

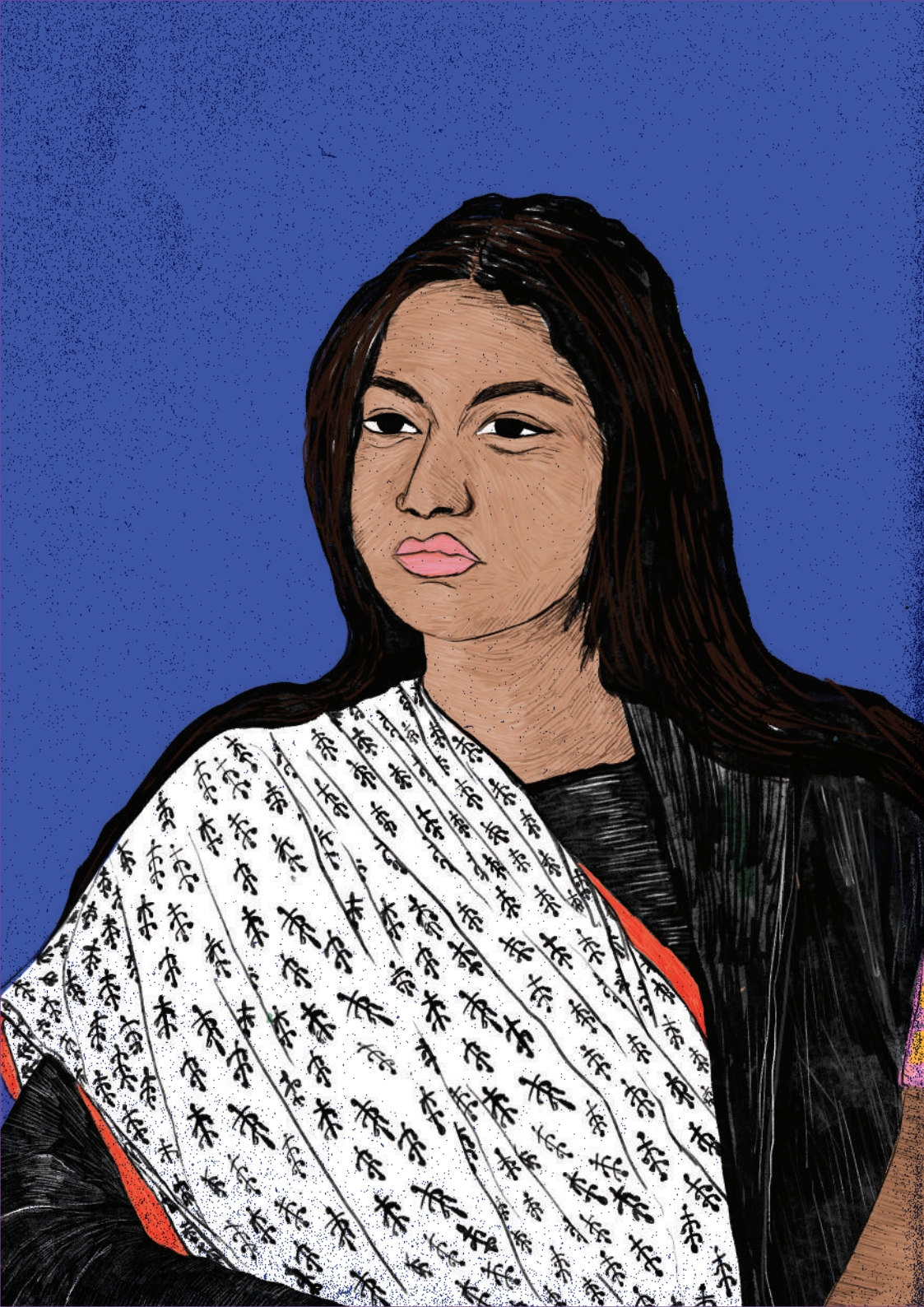
But the stigma of being 'born criminals' stays with Denotified Tribes even today. People's experience of criminalisation, policing and state persecution is tied in to their everyday experiences as members of these tribes. And so the experience of justice, or the lack thereof, is essentially a community experience.

"I belong to a denotified tribal community. Indigenous communities like mine live with the insidious presence of the police in our lives. We experience the everydayness of the criminal justice system – it is criminalising you, incarcerating you, violating you. It is not a criminal justice system that will deliver justice to you. And you know that."

– **Disha Wadekar, Advocate and co-founder of CEDE (Community for the Eradication of Discrimination in Education and Employment)**

"The legacy of the Criminal Tribes Act survives in many ways. For example, the Habitual Offenders Act enables police stations to maintain registers of those they consider to be habitual offenders or externment provisions that prevent people from accessing certain districts for a given period of time. You have kids, adults, men, women, senior citizens who are being picked up by the police and blamed for unsolved cases. The targeting is rampant."

– **Nikita Sonavane, Advocate and co-founder of CPAP (Criminal Justice and Police Accountability Project)**



Disha:

“I have always maintained that the law is casteist. This whole idea that law delivers justice or that law is good does not resonate with me. I took up the practice of law because I hated law. I hated what law did to humans and how unjust it was.”

Nikita:

“I thought it’s important for me to understand how a system that is supposedly required to dispense justice has managed to, in fact, reproduce the sorts of structures of inequality that it sought to address.”



Nikita on justice and the impact that everyday police actions have on certain communities:

At CPAP, we look at FIRs and arrest data under specific legislations like the Excise Act, gambling provisions and administrative provisions like externment and even Section 188, which was used to invoke the lockdown during the pandemic. We think that for us to make a claim that this policing happens in a targeted manner, it's important that we look at these laws and show that the laws have a disparate and disproportionate impact on the lives of certain communities. We saw this with Section 377, where it was possible for the queer community to make their case because they were able to establish that a seemingly neutrally worded provision was being selectively used to target certain communities. So we want to do that with the denotified tribes – to be able to establish that policing upholds the sort of legacy of hereditary criminalisation, which is inherently casteist in nature.

Disha on the casteist nature of the law and how representation ought to be a goal in itself:

I represent 15% of the population yet when I entered the legal profession, I could not find another person from my community. The legal profession runs on networks to secure internships and jobs. But many Bahujans today are first generation learners and have no one to support their aspirations. This is where CEDE comes in – to create those missing networks, to say we understand, to say we see where you are coming from. To support diverse voices to enter the legal profession and challenge the entrenched power structures. We believe that the legal system will not be just if it is not duly representative of the very communities that are most affected by it. Whether it is the police, medical officers, prison officials, judges or lawyers – each actor in the justice system matters. They determine whom to arrest, how investigations happen, what evidence to look for, what is recorded in the forensic lab, who is convicted and what defence an accused is afforded. These are the people behind the abstract entity of a *state* who hold the power to make decisions.

We call for arrest and harsh punishment until there is an arrest and then we move on to the next big thing.

Is there an immediate need to flip the dominant narrative prevailing around crime and punishment?

– Keerthana Medarametla

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

WORDS BY KEERTHANA MEDARAMETLA | ILLUSTRATION BY TOSHI SINGH



At 15, I was glued to TV campaigns and hoping to see the accused in Jessica Lal and Priyadarshini Mattoo's murder be given the harshest punishment.



At 20, I visited Tihar Jail for the first time to meet prisoners as part of a legal aid project in law school.

At 21, I interviewed prisoners on deathrow and their families for the first time.

At 25, I spent a year interviewing prisoners charged with and convicted under the NDPS act. (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances)

The cognitive dissonance between a teenager who celebrated the eventual convictions and the young adult who witnessed the experience of jail on prisoners and their families became real.



The more I worked in the criminal justice system, the more I witnessed a system not designed for **SURVIVORS**

Nor does it provide **ACCUSED** space for accountability, responsibility and reformation.

And not to forget the impact of the system on the families of both survivors and the accused.

With a belief that we need to look beyond the formal system for justice, I reached out to some friends and acquaintances who work in and with the criminal justice system. Who agree that the system as is, does not provide space for justice, accountability or healing and through their work are exploring what the alternatives may look like.



KSHIPRA MARATHE

Kshipra is a forensic psychologist at Ashiyara foundation, working with a restorative lens with children in conflict with the law. She believes in justice that heals, creates safe spaces for conversation and isn't shaming and stigmatizing.

Arti is a lawyer who has litigated for children who've experienced abuse and is now in the field of restorative justice. She hopes for a world where harm isn't responded to with inflicting more harm and where, with compassion and accountability, we interrupt cycles of harm.



ARTI MOHAN

Vandita is a human rights lawyer, entrepreneur and the founder of One Future Collective. She is motivated to do this work because she believes in the power of community and of repairing harm. She has seen first-hand how transformative justice can prevent cycles of abuse from continuing.



MINI SAXENA

Mini is a lawyer working at the intersection of law and gender and is the founder of the Consent Project. She is constantly questioning our contemporary criminal and carceral frameworks of responding to sexual harms, as she looks for alternatives both inside and outside the system.



VANDITA MORARKA

←

Where do we go from here?
Mini, Kshipra, Arti, Vandita, You

📶
📺
📞

Keerthana
What do you think an alternate criminal justice system would look like?
7:38 pm

Mini
To start with, an acknowledgement of the harm caused / the wrongdoing. Then to take responsibility for it- that could range from saying sorry to seeking therapy.
7:38 pm

Kshipra
I also think just a lot of individual work, especially with children in conflict with the law, creates that alternative framework at an individual level.
7:43 pm

Arti
I think restorative practices that create spaces for sharing, being heard and really accepted for who we are hold space for slow but genuine change.
7:43 pm

Keerthana
Is there an immediate need to flip the dominant narrative prevailing around crime and punishment?
7:45 pm

Kshipra
You know, I had a discussion with a child I worked with after watching the movie Rubaroo Roshini. And we wondered what it would've been like if Kasab could get a second chance.
7:45 pm

Mini
It's tricky because I think sometimes survivors are very open to talking it out with those who have caused them harm. Other times they may absolutely not be. So it's quite a case-by-case situation, I would say? I almost always try to recommend the first option but it doesn't work for everyone - some survivors may be completely re-traumatized just by seeing the perpetrator's face.
7:48 pm

Arti
Definitely! While restorative justice can be powerful, I strongly believe it is not a panacea and not for everyone. Restorative spaces of many different types which put the person harmed at the centre may be a beautiful space.
7:50 pm



Where do we go from here?

Mini, Kshipra, Arti, Vandita, You



Keerthana
 From a spiritual perspective, I can't seem to reconcile the idea of punishment with justice. As Ram Dass says, aren't we all walking each other home? Is there work to be done if the survivors believe harsh punishment is justice?
 7:51 pm ✓

Vandita
 Ah. My view on this is that one person's opinion, even when they are a survivor, can be their opinion / desire / idea of justice.
 However, systemically individual desires cannot be manifested as solutions. We know that those who actually get any form of legal punishment are often from oppressed groups. So while as a survivor, I may want the death penalty and my desire would be completely valid, I don't think it can be a solution endorsed by communities
 7:53 pm ✓

Mini
 Interesting question. I completely agree with Vandita. I struggle with how to have this conversation if I know a survivor like that?
 7:54 pm ✓

Arti
 Something I have been reflecting on! So many families of abused children seek the harshest possible punishment, and with all the pain they have experienced with their children having been brutally harmed, I understand their emotions. So many have not had access to safe spaces for healing and support, have no access to alternative spaces. Perhaps even if they did, some may hold onto these needs - I don't think individual needs around that can be endorsed by systems.
 7:58 pm ✓

Kshipra
 I think as a response to the harm they've experienced, it's very real to think of death penalty / imprisonment as justice. They definitely need to be given a space for healing in a way that is okay for them and for their idea of justice. As a survivor, I've seen my own ideas of justice change over the period of time.
 8:00 pm ✓

Vandita
 Oh for sure. I've had these demands as a survivor myself and I've seen this change for me over time.
 8:01 pm ✓



Where do we go from here?

Mini, Kshipra, Arti, Vandita, You



Keerthana
 That's true... Are you sensing pressure on survivors to reconcile the idea of punishment with justice before they are ready to? Particularly on social media?
 8:03 pm ✓

Arti
 I have this concern about the language around abolition/ healing being inflated with intense shaming or with asking survivors to keep quiet. Or on the flip side, we use language that shames people who have caused harm in the name of accountability. And social media seems to be fueling this in so many ways.
 8:08 pm ✓

Kshipra
 There've been some beautiful spaces on social media for healing and accountability. But generally yeah, the trends are quite harmful to the survivors and those who caused harm.
 8:10 pm ✓

Arti
 I've been working with young law students recently and a lot of them spoke about how social media effectively "cancels" the wrongdoer while also not providing meaningful support to the survivor or long-term change.
 8:12 pm ✓

Vandita
 I may sound politically incorrect but I think there's a hyper romanticisation of restorative and transformative justice without any actual work towards it. There are demands made of survivors that should be made of systems. There's no effort to build communities that can hold such space for change and there's a lot of shaming of survivors for choosing a certain way of seeking justice for themselves. I think we need to find ways to do this work in a way that builds community capacities for change.
 8:16 pm ✓

Arti
 I have the very same concern. There is a lot of self-work that goes into such a change, and slow, gradual work in the communities as well. We cannot replace that with quick fix restorative transformative responses.
 8:20 pm ✓

Vandita
 Yes! We need to do this work together and put in the time and effort required to get us there, which includes spending time on ourselves.
 8:30 pm ✓

“If you can order your food online, you are hailing cabs online, you are paying online, why aren’t you solving your legal disputes online?”

— Overheard at Sama

WORDS BY TAMMANA AURORA · ART BY DEBANGSHU MOULIK

case managers kaun?



* kaun · who

In 2020, when the pandemic hit and the world went into lockdown, 600 law students logged on to their computers and smartphones all over India to take on the challenge of conducting Lok Adalats online for the very first time.

Up until then, people from small towns and villages, including shopkeepers, farmers, vegetable vendors, homeowners, men and women, had to leave behind their work and travel to the nearest districts or city centres to settle their disputes. Often, disputes stretched out over months or years.

Working with Sama as case managers, Ajitesh Priyadarshi, Sushmita Sen, Pritesh Kumar, Divyesh Rao, Tejal Deora and hundreds of other law school students held the key to a smooth transition of Lok Adalats from offline forums to an online platform.

“ People do not trust that disputes can be resolved online. So we need to build that trust and explain concepts like mediation and Online Dispute Resolution (ODR). Also, there are many people who don't know how to use basic technology and who struggle with using smartphones. We have to show them the basics, like how to open a link with the notice, what an e-signature is, how to join a conference call, etc. We need to guide people through these new processes. ”
 – Sushmita

Lok Adalats

Lok Adalats are out-of-court forums conducted by the National Legal Services Authorities (NALSA) to amicably resolve disputes in civil matters relating to small financial matters, loans, water and electricity bills, traffic challans, marital disputes and others.

Sama

Sama is a startup that uses technology to help parties resolve their legal disputes fully online, using methods that are collaborative in nature. It is founded by three twenty-something-year-olds: Akshetha Ashok, Pranjal Sinha and Vikram Kumar.

Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)

Online Dispute Resolution allows people to resolve legal disputes from anywhere, through laptops and smartphones. It relies on processes such as negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration to resolve cases at a fraction of the cost and time usually incurred by traditional mechanisms such as going to court.

"In Bihar, there was a boy who had taken a loan and was not able to repay the money. I told him that there was no need to be scared. This was not like a case in the court; we could talk about it and find a settlement." – Pritesh

"We are responsible for over 2,000 cases from district and taluka levels each time. It helps me practically understand where cases come from, what the problems are and how to solve them." – Pritesh

"A working phone number is required to send a link over SMS. But some cases are so old that people have changed their numbers. Also, many people don't even have a phone number or email." – Divyesh

"Earlier, notices were sent out via registered post and cost around ₹20 per notice. Imagine the cost incurred just to send notices if you are a corporation or a bank with over 10,000 cases!" – Ajitesh

ASSISTING DURING SETTLEMENT CALLS

FOLLOW-UP ON DIGITAL NOTICE

"Baat kar lo, baat karne se sab ho jayega."
[Talk about it, talking will help us solve a lot of things.] – Divyesh

CONVINCING PEOPLE TO GIVE ODR A TRY

UPLOADING CASES TO AN ONLINE PLATFORM

CASE MANAGERS

"We have to explain to people that this is a completely voluntary process and that they can opt out at any time. At the same time, this is a safe, transparent process offering faster solutions to their disputes." – Sushmita

"In Madhya Pradesh, we had to introduce desktops at police stations and train them on how to upload cases and use tools like Excel." – Divyesh

REACHING A SETTLEMENT

"The only way to reach a resolution is to listen. We work with empanelled mediators who are committed to the process for 15 to 20 days and have time to listen and interact with the disputing parties." – Ajitesh

"Even the authorities were doubtful if we could pull off an online Lok Adalat in Bihar. But when the data came in, we couldn't believe it – over ₹118 crores in settlement value! That too in a place where people are not digitally aware and were asking us how to use smartphones, how to sign up and how to enter the OTP." – Pritesh

LEARNING NEW SKILLS

"Your behaviour changes after one Lok Adalat itself. I have learnt to be patient and convey my point and to not lose my temper. Even my family has joined in. Now, when there is a small argument at home, they tease me saying, 'Oh, you tell people *suljhao magar pyaar se*, but here you are fighting with us.'" – Tejal

Sama's Tagline. It means "Resolve, with compassion."

THE!
An average case
takes 3-4 years
to resolve.

PE TAREEKH
PE TAREEKH
but

“Initially, the work just took around an hour of my day for a month, and I thought, ‘*Chalo*, at least I will learn something while sitting at home,’” says Ajitesh.

Ajitesh was so effective in his role as a case manager that in 2021, as he turned 21, he was entrusted to lead the Maharashtra Online Lok Adalat that Sama was facilitating. That Lok Adalat handled 18,000 disputes, with the total settlement value crossing ₹14 crores in 17 days.

“What keeps me going,” he says, “is matters getting resolved with our help through phone calls, guidance and personal involvement. It’s satisfying knowing that you are improving, even changing peoples’ lives. *Ek tension hi unke life se gayab ho gayi hai.*”
[You’ve removed a big source of stress from their lives.]

Since 2020, Sama has enabled Lok Adalats to be conducted online in six states with the total settlement value crossing ₹553 crores. Case Managers such as Ajitesh, Sushmita, Pritesh, Divyesh, Tejal and others have come to be an integral part of Sama’s team and the ODR process itself.

“Our case managers are typically law students or young professionals who act as a bridge between the disputing parties and the dispute resolution system where needed. They hail from every corner of India and speak the language of the people, and so they are able to listen to what is really important in different regions, how different people communicate, and what are the specific cultural differences to keep in mind. These are the kind of ground realities that when relayed back to us, enable us to build features that work. We’re able to build features that are actually needed rather than what we think might be needed. That’s the game changer.”

– Akshetha Ashok, co-founder of Sama, on building thoughtful technology with the help of case managers

My lived
experiences are
enough to shape
the law. I don't
need to have
any expertise.

— Antaraa Vasudev

the feedback loop

WORDS BY TAMMANNA AURORA & SHONOTTRA KUMAR
ART BY SIDDHARTH BHATIA

Antaraa was eight years old when she wrote a letter to the President of India about the garbage that was being dumped on the roads near her house.

She gave the letter to the *paanwala* behind her house (who had a picture with the President up on his wall) and he obliged by giving it to the President's *dhobi*, who reached it to his office!

Today, at 28, Antaraa is the founder of Civis, a platform that simplifies how every one of us can give feedback on draft laws and policies that are proposed by the central legislature, state governments and other committees. "As citizens, we have all these superpowers," she says. "We can vote, we can file RTIs, we can protest peacefully. We can also help shape the laws of our country before they are passed."

This superpower exists thanks to a 2014 policy that encourages the government to ask for feedback on laws that impact us in different ways. This means that we have the ability to submit feedback on a draft of a law before it is passed. Civis has enabled consultations for the framing of an online dispute resolution policy, feedback on environment impact assessment laws, comments on the Supreme Court's vision for digitisation of courts, inputs for electricity regulation and over 200 other laws and regulations.

So how exactly does it work? Antaraa shares an example:

In 2020, the government published the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules. But as we know, laws as they are, are not very easy to read. The first step was to find the draft law on the government website and work with volunteers to simplify and explain what each of the provisions meant. Then it was important that the transgender community and the non-profits working with them heard about this and were able to share their comments on time.

Through extensive outreach, Civis was able to reach members of the transgender community and get them on to the Civis platform to share inputs based on their daily lives; on how it could be made easier to avail the benefits and actually use the law well as a trans person.

These are rules that have been hotly debated in the past (and continue to be tbh). Yet, within two months, 52% of the feedback received was incorporated into the new law!



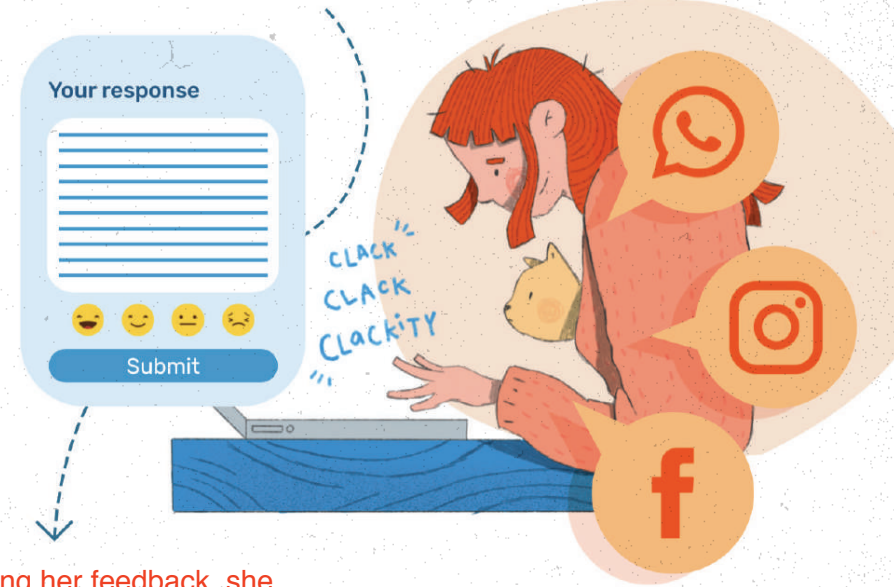
A citizen - Ria, finds out about a draft law asking for a feedback on a Whatsapp group.

She realises that the law impacts her and notices that there aren't too many responses to it.

She goes to the Civis website and reads about the law.

civis.vote

Having read a summary - she types what she thinks. She's not an expert on the topic but she understands how this would affect her and hence, gives her feedback.



After giving her feedback, she shares the law with other friends who are also impacted by the law.

In the meantime, Civis takes her feedback along with every other citizen who participated in this process, analyses it and presents it to the concerned ministry.



A few months later, Ria hears from Civis that her voice was heard! Suggestions from her and her community were implemented by the government in the new law.

To many, Civis is like the *paanwala* or the *dhobi* who made it possible for a letter to reach the President, making sure individual voices are heard.

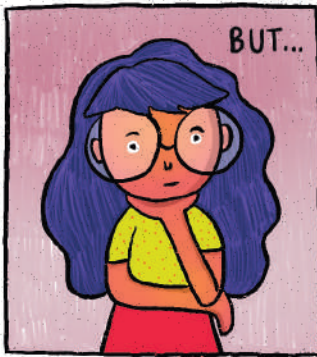
“ Sometimes, we partner with governments to conduct consultations and make sure every voice gets heard. In other cases, we share anonymised feedback reports with partner organisations who can reach this feedback to the government. For every law, we have detailed analytics that track when and how frequently our reports are opened and read, so that we can get back to you with accurate updates. No matter how many months it takes, we keep tracking updates to the law. When the new version of the law is released, we tally all the new changes against your feedback, so that we can tell you what has changed and if an individual voice was heard. ”
– Antaraa

Many months later, members of the transgender community continue to reach out to Civis for clarifications regarding access to their entitlements. And somewhere, in that quiet trust that has been built, you understand how powerful having your voice heard can be.

As Antaraa likes to say,
Democracy does not just happen once.
It happens every day with our involvement.

I think the biggest win is when young students start to see that law and justice is something worth investing time in.

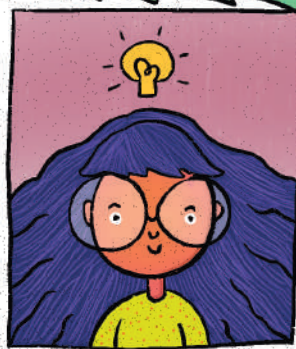
– Vibha Nadig



OUTLAWED

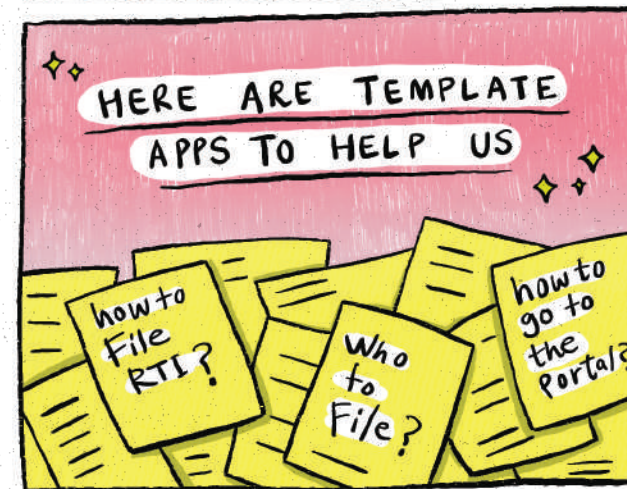
LEGAL LITERACY FOR ALL

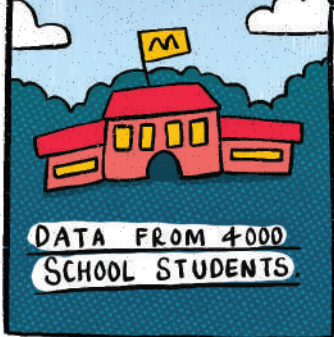
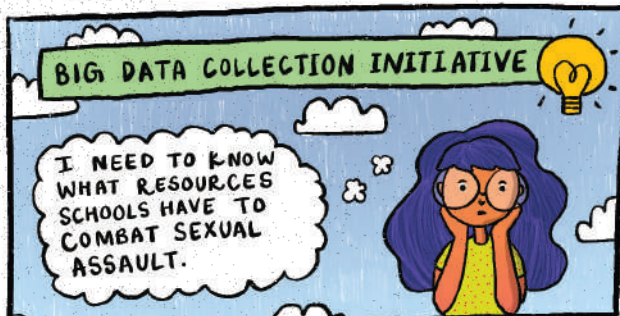
written & illustrated by Sunny Sumari



NOT JUST LAW STUDENTS, PEOPLE STUDYING MEDICINE, ENGINEERING, DESIGN, ALSO CAME FORWARD.







END.

Ananya :

What do you like
about data?

Smita :

I like the fact
that it tells a story
without actually
hiding anything.
It tells you
everything you
need to know. It's
the objective truth.

for the love of data

WORDS BY SMITA GUPTA · ART BY ANANYA PAREKH

HI, I'M SMITA. I'D LIKE TO TALK
TO YOU ABOUT WHAT I LIKE ABOUT

D A T A



My story really begins in the summer of 2021 when I was fresh out of law school, or as I now remember it, the Summer of Data. It was when I, along with 37 other students, spent five weeks building a dataset mapping the background of High Court judges that I really started to get curious about the stories data was telling.

I could relate when Harshita Tyagi, a second-year law student who was also working on the datasets with me said, "I felt a sense of pride in what I was doing and my driving force was that I was doing something so different, new and cool, something that my peers had no idea about. I didn't find it taxing, rather, I felt a sense of joy in my work."

What was especially fascinating to me was that we can use data in so many different ways. I loved hearing Advocate Shrutanjaya tell us about the 2021 Maratha reservation case in the Supreme Court. The Court had to decide whether or not to uphold the 50% rule affirmed by a nine Judge Bench in the 1992 Indira Sawhney case.

Advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan presented a mere two-page submission – a chart containing research done by his junior, Advocate Shrutanjaya. No, not case laws to substantiate the doctrine of *stare decisis*. Rather, data on the number of times the 50% rule had ever been upheld by the Supreme Court...and that number was 50!



STARE DECISIS : A DOCTRINE OF FOLLOWING
THE RULES OR PRINCIPLES LAID DOWN
IN PREVIOUS JUDICIAL DECISIONS

Five years of law school and I had never heard of empirical data being interpreted as precedent before. That you could use case laws as powerful and effective data points.

This made me realise that data can help inform good decisions, good laws and good policy. In trying to create a dataset, I also started to realise how little data was openly available. Sometimes, all we had was the name of a judge, their date of appointment and date of retirement. It made us equal parts nervous and incredulous that we kept coming up blank on very important factors like their chamber, empanelment and educational details prior to becoming judges!

While openly available data in law and justice is hard to find, sometimes it simply doesn't exist! What's worse is that 'no data' can become an easy fallback to evade accountability. For example, take what happened when the pandemic started in 2020.

"The government denied the death of migrant workers during the first wave of the pandemic since they did not have the data for it. So they claimed that their responsibility for compensation also did not arise," Rohit Sharma, a young lawyer, told me.

The migrant crisis was unfolding around the same time Rohit was graduating from law school. Rohit wanted to fight this 'no data, no responsibility' approach so he and his friend Rakshita Agarwal got over 60 volunteers on board to create a first-of-its-kind report on the plight of out-of-work migrants in Madhya Pradesh.

60+ VOLUNTEERS, 3,000 OUT OF WORK MIGRANT WORKERS, 1 REPORT ANALYSIS OF THE MIGRANT CRISIS IN MP DURING LOCKDOWN 1.0



This report can go on to impact policies, law and disaster management protocols that affect migrant workers in the future. Before this, I had always thought that collecting so much data and tabulating it was almost not worth it.

Shreyas, a fourth-year law student, doesn't find data to be tedious work at all. Since Summer of Data, he has been so drawn in by the possibilities it offers that he has started building his own datasets. Motivated by this experience, Shreyas, Harshita and 80 others spent weeks contributing to the creation of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) model for automated judgement summarisation using... you guessed it, open data!

"I just know that the natural progression of the legal field is that data and AI will be the drivers of change, and we must adopt them to become better thinkers of the law. I want to see an AI predictive model facilitating me as a lawyer in the next five to ten years. And if law students learning AI tools like R, Stata or Label Studio can help us get there, I am game!" says Shreyas.

"The possibilities are endless," says Abhishek Kushwaha, a fifth-year law student and fellow data enthusiast. "When data is made publicly available and is open-sourced, it can be used to train an AI model to summarise judgments, aid in automatic charge identification and even be used to create a legal aid chatbot! But until we open up the data, nothing can be achieved."



Remember the Maratha reservation case I was telling you about?

Shrutanjaya's research yielded a simple table with the names of all the judges who have previously upheld the 50% rule in the Indra Sawhney judgement. And when presented to the Supreme Court Bench, each judge found something surprising there.

Their own names featured in that table as judges who have previously upheld this rule. They were mentioned in that table as a data point!

Data throws up cool plot twists like these all the time!

I don't know if this backend work will ever be reflected in the final feature you see as a user.

At the end of the day, it's going to be a button which you click on and it will take you where you need to go. But it takes a long time to create that button.

— Shruiti Kaushik

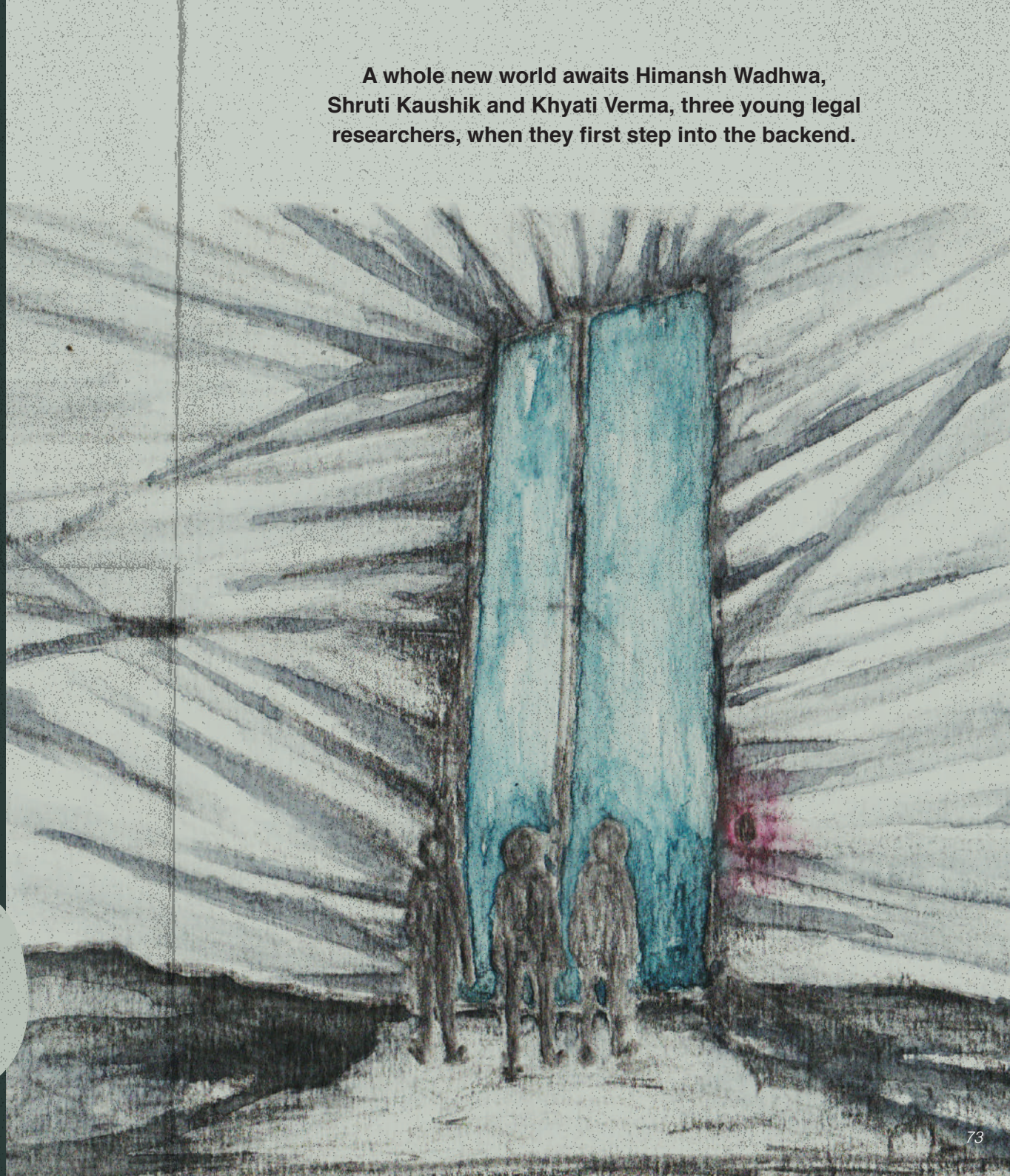
what do we do with two crore legal documents?

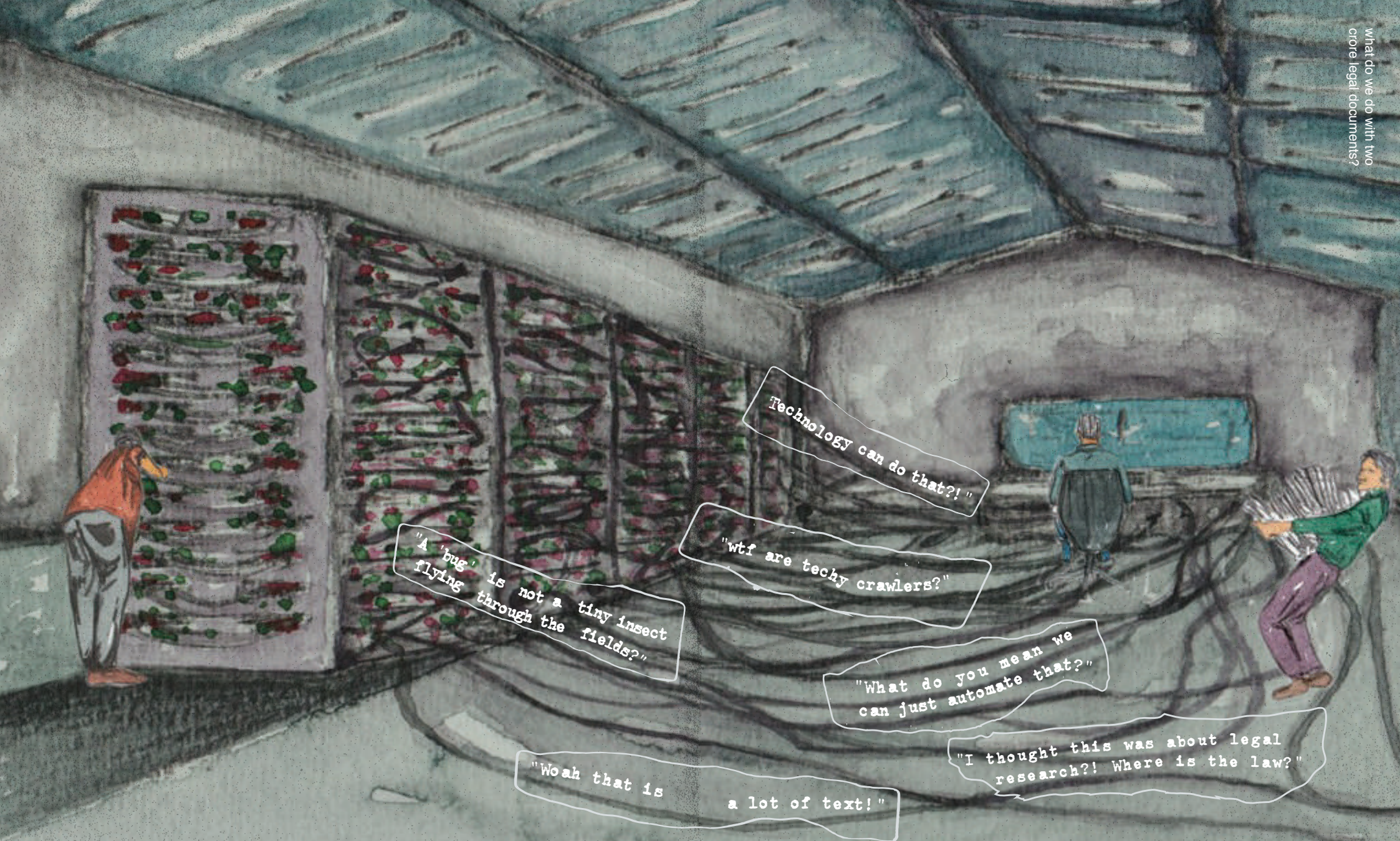
WORDS BY TAMMANNA AURORA, HIMANSH WADHWA & SHRUTI KAUSHIK · ART BY MOHIT MAHATO

If you are a lawyer, a law student or have ever looked up a court judgement or any law online, you probably already know about Indian Kanoon, a free legal search engine – all about the law. At the backend, however, it is a tech product through and through!

“Sushant, the founder of Indian Kanoon makes sure to send us resources to make sense of the backend. In just one year, we’ve had to understand a lot of new terminology related to how the software world functions.” – H

A whole new world awaits Himansh Wadhwa, Shruti Kaushik and Khyati Verma, three young legal researchers, when they first step into the backend.





Technology can do that?!"

"A 'bug' is not a tiny insect flying through the fields?"

"wtf are techy crawlers?"

"What do you mean we can just automate that?"

"I thought this was about legal research?! Where is the law?"

"Woah that is a lot of text!"

Sushant, through his techy crawlers (a program that systematically browses a database in order to create an index of data), has gathered more than two crore legal documents. These are increasing everyday and will continue to grow.

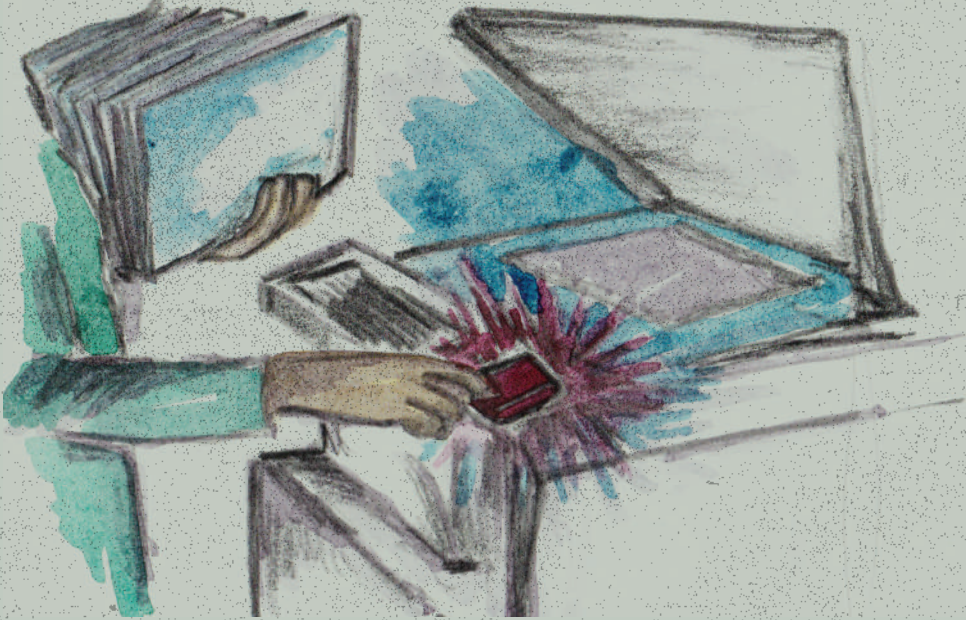
What do we do with them?
What do we do with two crore documents?

“Data is our number one source. We are building on top of a vast existing database. How do we categorise and input certain phrases and words, and come up with new features for the platform? Innumerable possibilities and solutions exist! We have a chance to build automated systems that we wished existed when we were in college and would be useful in our legal practice.” — S

Daily strolls through this massive data corpus lead them to categorise, define and simplify this endless legal shrine of legal documents.



“Aren't these judgments too long? Reading hundreds of pages of legal jargon and its implicit structures is confusing and intimidating. Often, what we seek to know gets lost in figuring out this layout...” — S



“We need to make these documents accessible and also readable so that it is not just academics or lawyers who understand the law, but everybody.” — H

The data corpus that Indian Kanoon is dealing with is not just from the 2010s when the Courts actually started digitising the process. There are judgments from the 1930s and acts starting from the 1900s. Laws from the 1800s like the Colonial Probates Act, 1892, the British Law Ascertainment Act, 1859, and even acts made by the Queen and the East India Company.

“We are covering every damn update that has been made to individual laws from the 1800s till 2022!” – K

“So maybe the larger idea is to map the complete evolution of jurisprudence in India? It’s not just feeding in data but also to make sense of the same.” – S

Jurisprudence

(noun): the philosophy of law

Today, when we discuss terms like freedom, privacy, homosexuality, property or environmental rights, they have specific legal meanings. As the stance of the judiciary towards a certain class of rights evolves, language itself starts to evolve and words take on new meanings. Court orders and judgements are a great place to observe the continuous journey and evolution of the law.

Indian Kanoon’s work starts with identifying the different paragraphs and sections in a judgement and labelling them. The idea is to train the machine to recognise the basic structure of a judgement like facts, issues, arguments, precedents, etc. so that it can concisely analyse these long judgements.

But making a machine intelligent enough to categorise over 100 years of judicial evolution through Machine Learning (ML) and rule-based systems is not without its challenges.

“Teaching a machine comes in stark contrast to teaching humans. It doesn’t ask why something is part of one class and not another, or the origin or rationale behind a feature. But it is quick to point out your own inconsistencies.” – H

“We used to think it was just language (Hindi, English, etc.) that matters. But seeing how a new and hard-to-read font messed up our platform, we’ve learnt that even the choice of font matters!” – S

How ML functions is starkly different when you read about it as a social researcher versus when you are actually feeding in data every day for eight hours. And the machine is always learning...

As legal researchers, they had been encouraged to read between the lines and pay attention to the context in which words are said. But now, 'annotators bias' is a fear they face, so they have to learn to focus on the text at hand and not allow their individual identities and opinions to influence the annotation process.

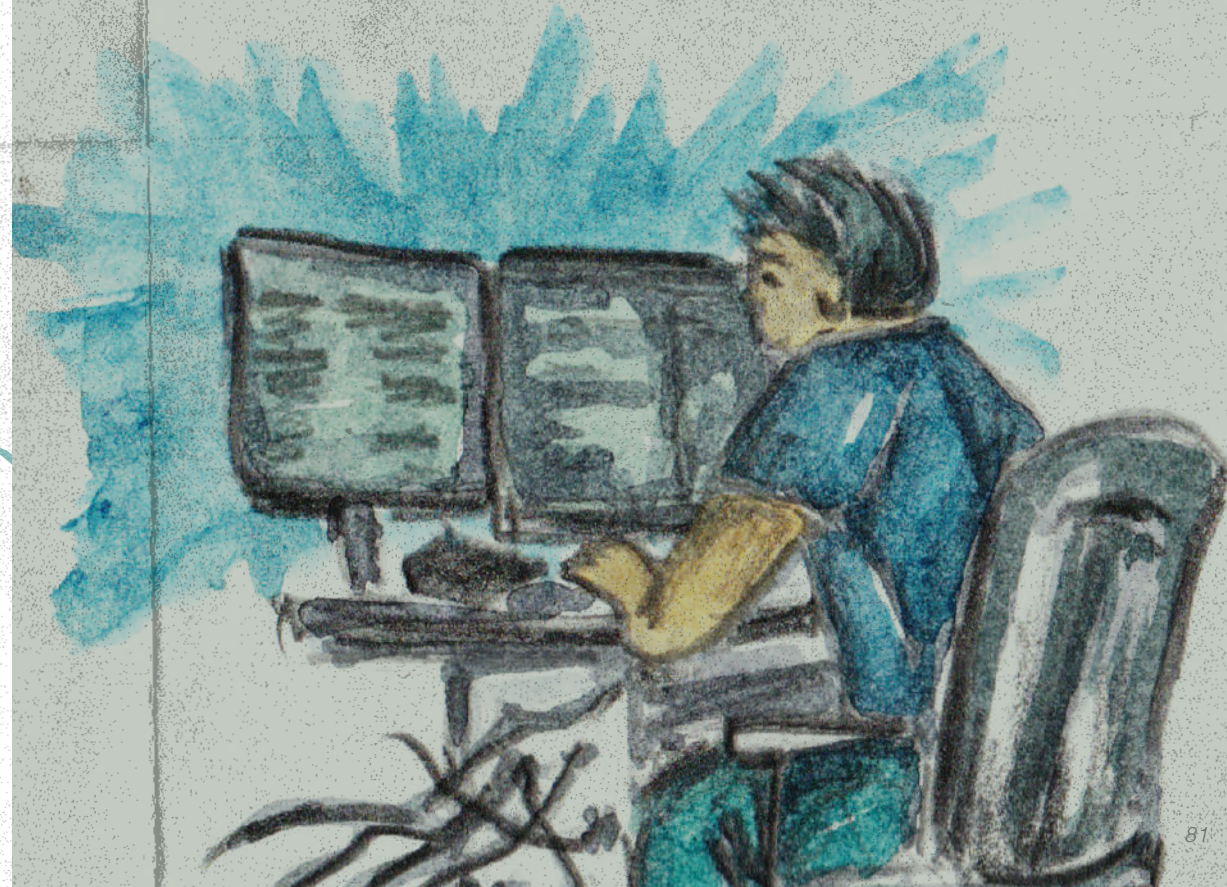
"Sometimes, we end up having hour-long discussions about just one paragraph we are annotating!" – H

"We have spent so much time with the ML training system that it manages to surprise and disappoint us all at the same time. We gasp with excitement when it correctly annotates something difficult to classify, but are bummed out when it fails to recognise an easy classification." – H

"We're learning and unlearning something new every day. Decoding this unorganised legal history is equally challenging and exciting!" – S

In their roles at Indian Kanoon, Himansh, Shruti and Khyati are at the centre of both the legal and the tech world while also belonging to neither.

Somewhere, there is a venn diagram between tech and law, with an accessible knowledge base in between. To arrive at that intersection point is the vision that keeps them going.



People across
social and
disciplinary silos
were taking
the time to pay
attention to a
forest, to listen

carefully to each
other and transmit
non-human and
youth voices to the
public via powerful
storytelling.

— Francesca Cotta

AMCHE MOLLEM

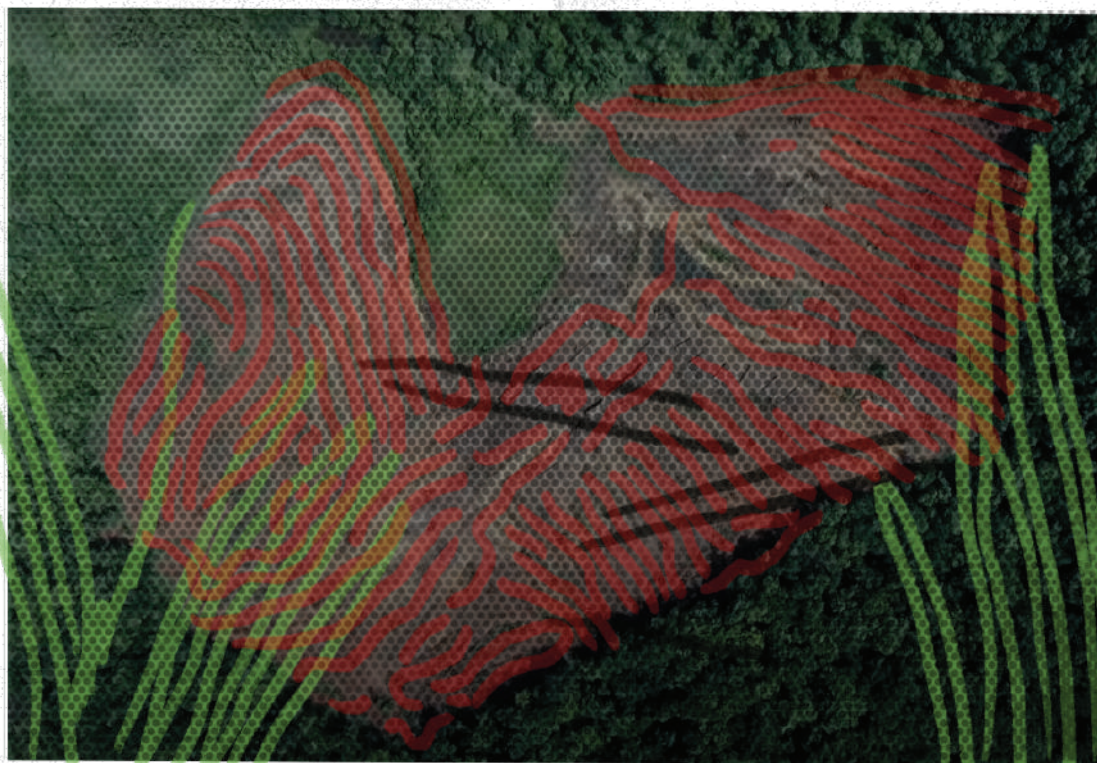
WORDS BY FRANCESCA COTTA · ART BY DEEPTI SHARMA

In April 2020, in the midst of a total lockdown, I received a phone call from my friend Gabriella. It was her photographs of a razed forest that had first caught my attention. These photos of a vast swathe of land cleared of all its trees in Mollem National Park had been appearing on Instagram for a few days then with the hashtag #MyMollem.

Soon, news trickled in: the government had given hasty, unscientific environmental clearances via Zoom for three linear infrastructure projects that cut through Mollem National Park and Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary – which form a part of the Western Ghats in Goa.

The clearances had been given without public consultation. Pictures showing thousands of trees felled in a section of the forest indicated that work on the projects had already begun.

a collective dream, a people's movement



one of the first images of the clearing in Mollem which shook people into action

Gabriella told me that a few citizens were starting to put together information on the issue so that everyone could learn about what was happening in Mollem. Did I want to help out with this? I told her I did.

Many such phone calls were made over the next couple of weeks. To whom, we wondered, did a 150 million year old ecosystem ultimately belong? One answer came up again and again:

Mollem belongs to everyone.

The big picture is this: Goa's forests, particularly the protected areas at stake, form the lifeline of this little coastal state. They are the monsoon makers, the source of its clean air and water, and home to countless species (many of them endemic to the Western Ghats) apart from human beings, each depending on this precious ecosystem to survive. In addition to this, the forests are an infinite source of inspiration and joy to Goans. They are home to our ancestral gods, breathtaking waterfalls, and the site of many of our school picnics and rainy day treks from our childhood.

I could feel my grief and anger. I felt it stirring through all of us – in group chats, on Zoom calls and on social media. But was it enough? I had no idea back then that those first few posts online and conversations with fellow Goans would spark a spontaneous outpouring of love, art and a fierce determination to save our forests.

As understanding and awareness grew, people began to write in asking, "What can I do?"

Although we didn't realise it right away, we were teaching ourselves how to be active citizens by building a campaign around our beloved forests.

As a climate activist who had cut my campaigning teeth volunteering at Extinction Rebellion and other movements over the past year, I could sense, even during the early days, that something special was brewing in the Mollem movement. I felt it when I saw Deepti's lovely drawings of a Sri Lankan frogmouth and a Malabar grey hornbill, inspired by one of the campaign's Scientists Share sessions she'd attended online. When I saw words I had written in earnest, often late at night, turned into a beautiful poster or infographic.

My heart swelled when an old school friend called up one day to find out how she could get involved too. People across social and disciplinary silos were taking the time to pay attention to a forest, to listen carefully to each other and transmit non-human and youth voices to the public via powerful storytelling.





In less than two years, the *Amche Mollem* campaign made representations to the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Court, attended public hearings and spoke with members of political parties about the future we envision for Goa and her forests.

In April 2021, the CEC recommended the wholesale cancellation of the railway doubling project, and going back to the old alignment with no new trees being cut for the Tamnar railway line.

And in April 2022, these recommendations were accepted by the Supreme Court. A crucial win!

Sometimes though, I think that Mollem's biggest win is that it brought about a revolution of the Goan heart and spirit, a reconfiguration of what it means to belong to a place. It feels like we have come of age as citizens during this campaign. For many of us, it has been our first meaningful civic engagement. And many more youth are stepping forward to take action to protect Goa's natural heritage.

The proposed fragmentation of Mollem is not an isolated issue. What is happening in these forests connects with a broad range of environmental issues affecting the future of this small state: the destruction of our rivers, mangroves, farmlands and forests has been underway for years. So we put together a green manifesto for Goa. It serves as a collective demand from the youth of Goa for political leaders to create party manifestos that focus on resilience, sustainability, equity and social justice.

On this one, simple point, the youth of Goa are stubborn, uncompromising and hugely convinced: we deserve nothing less than a future full of forests!



Change is like a baton that you run with and then pass onto the next group of people.

It is a continuous process and we strive for that change every day.

— Apoorva Srivastava, Program Coordinator, AALI.

a feeling we've all felt before

WORDS BY VAIBHAVI MASKE · ART BY GHAZAL QADRI

You know that feeling when you did something seemingly impossible for the first time and realised that you were *capable* of doing it?

Call it a spark / confidence / self awareness / opening up of the world and its possibilities – it is a feeling we have all felt before.

There are girls in Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand that know this feeling intimately. They work with AALI (Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives Trust) to engage women on issues of law and justice. Seeing their familiar faces often encourages others to share the problems that they face and seek support. But more than being a response mechanism for issues that come up in their neighbourhood, these young women community leaders are creating awareness about the justice system so that people are more prepared to not just claim their rights but also enjoy them. Speak to any of them and you will see that a mini revolution has been set in motion...

Angel, 18

When Angel started meeting with other girls and women in her community, she realised that laws on sexual abuse and domestic violence were heavy subjects to begin with. She had to get creative for everyone to feel mentally and physically comfortable to speak about the issues they faced. So she broke the ice by asking women about their life and their work, trying to understand them before teaching them. This is a continuous process because with every session, she discovers a new aspect of each woman's life. Some women do not speak up in the meetings, so she meets them individually to hear their stories.

She is patient because when she started, she too had been someone who was scared to speak up. "The women I have trained are different now. And so am I. I can sense the change in us both."



" बोलने से डर लगता था, कि मैंने कुछ बोला और किसी को बुरा लगा तो? कुछ गलत बोल दिया तो?"

.....
"I used to be scared to speak up. What if I said something wrong or hurtful to someone?"

Madhu, 21

Madhu prepares for *Kishori Manch*, the weekly meeting with young girls in her locality. She fears for the safety of the girls as they approach the marriageable age, as young as 14 for some.

She recalls the first time she intervened in a matter of a child marriage with the help of the child welfare department officials and the police. The parents of the child bride promised to not pursue the marriage and the wedding was called off. Afterwards, the child welfare workers and the police officers went back to their offices, and Madhu was the only one left there to deal with the blame of ruining family relations. She chooses to brush off the sneers and comments that people make and focuses on being there for the girls.



“ परिवार में परेशानी हम ही लाती हैं। ”

“It is us who are blamed for causing problems in families.”

Nidhi, 21



“ महिलाओं का केस कोर्ट में ले तो लेते हैं, मगर कोर्ट हियरिंग में महिलाओं की पूरी बात सुनते ही नहीं। ”

“Court cases regarding women’s issues are taken up but during the hearing, they rarely listen to what the women have to say.”

As a caseworker, Nidhi has smooth interactions with *Gram Panchayat*, *Anganwadi* and ASHA workers; even the education officers and child welfare department are amicable with her. It is the police and court officials she struggles with the most.

Nidhi says that police and court officials often don’t entertain the cases she brings to them, and she bears the brunt of nasty comments directed towards the victim and herself. She expects them to do the bare minimum at this point – for the police officers to register complaints as they come and for the court officials to listen to what the woman has to say. She believes it isn’t too much to ask.

Reetika, 23



" मुझे अपने नाम से जाने, ना कि चाचा या पापा के नाम से। "

"I should be known by my name. Not my uncle's or my father's."

Reetika is honest about how all the small, daily struggles of convincing people about her work and abilities can take a toll on her. Yet she routinely encourages herself to go out and do her duties as a caseworker.

"Once the police and welfare workers leave, we end up bearing the brunt of the blame. It feels bad. Sometimes I even think of quitting this kind of work. But then I think about the women and tell myself, 'No, there is still more work to be done. There are so many out there who still need my support and encouragement.'"

Babli, 21

Babli is a budding lawyer and leader of the Dalit Women's Society in Chitrakoot who fiercely reminds those who don't take her seriously that she is a force to be reckoned with. She urges girls and women to speak up with the promise that if they do, she will put all her efforts into helping and protecting them.

She remembers her first day at the community centre meeting with young girls. "It was Savitri Bai Phule Jayanti and all the girls were excited to meet me for the first time. I urged them to dream, and told them that if they wanted, they could be where I am. I told them I was rooting for them to achieve their dreams, no matter how small or big."



" मैडम, आप हैं कौन? " " मैं ? मैं लड़की हूं, इंसान हूं। "

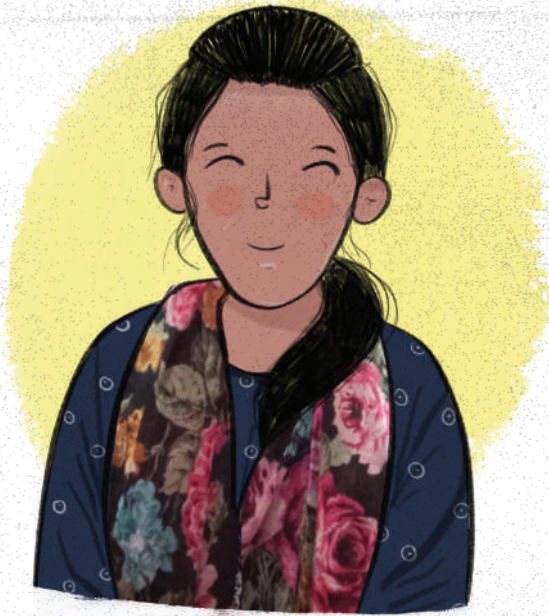
"Madam, who do you think you are?"

"I am a woman. I am a person."

Ritika, 21

Ritika had dreams of appearing for the civil services exam as her parents wanted her to. But with the work she does with the girls and women of her community through AALI, she realised that she engages with people from different sectors, like the police, politicians, teachers, parents, children, girls and women, NGOs and lawyers, and she enjoys being out in the world.

“It is a big deal that someone trusts you enough to share their innermost struggles with you. I find my own sense of self has changed since meeting these women who have exemplary courage. And that’s the thing – it’s not your name or fame that really matters, but your courage to keep doing and changing things.”



“ मैं इस लायक बन गई हूँ कि मैं किसी की मदद कर सकूँ। ”

“I have become someone who is capable of helping others.”

murmurations of change

When Agami approached me in October, 2021 to art direct a book on law and justice, impostor syndrome immediately set in. While I do strongly believe that the personal is political, I've never been inside a courtroom nor had to deal with lawyers in any capacity. My understanding of law merely extended to my own moral compass, following the news and actively participating in the CAA protests.

That inkling of self doubt was dispelled, however, when Tammanna, co-curator of this book, said, "There are other ways to demand justice than in the courtroom."

It was an idea that became the entry point for me to step into the justicemaking conversation: we could use subversive visual art and storytelling to reframe the narrative of law and justice in India!

We decided to take inspiration from the zine aesthetic. Historically, zines have always stood for dissent and counterculture. I love how ruleless they are as a medium, how they disrupt existing dysfunctional systems by reclaiming the power of the narrative.

By creating a whole new visual vocabulary for justicemaking, we started reimagining the justice system in India. A vocabulary that goes beyond the archaic imagery of judges in wigs with gavels in their hands, and the blindfolded Lady Justice holding the scales of justice.

Each story demanded a specific visual treatment and the visualisation process itself was a big learning curve. The AALI story needed Ghazal's softness while Debangshu's strong greyscale was what Sama's work needed; Siddharth's vector style could show how Civis works while Ananya's playful imagery worked for the open data story. For the Disha-Nikita story, Shrujana was the perfect fit as she works with caste in her art. Toshi, Sunny, Mohit and Deepti all created entire worlds within the pages for the more graphic stories. Hat tip to my dear friend and collaborator Mayur, who worked on the cover design and layout, and has shaped the zine's identity in such a seamless way that I'm still in awe.

In a country where censorship is rampant and democracy is dying, the hope is that this book becomes a safe space to explore new ways of seeing and being.

We are like the tiny squawking birds on the cover, collectively raising our voices and standing up against the mean ol' crow until we upturn the scales of justice and become a murmuration of change.

– Rohini Kejriwal, Founder of The Alipore Post

The Wild Owning



The Wild Owning



Justice Makers



Justice Makers



Justice Makers

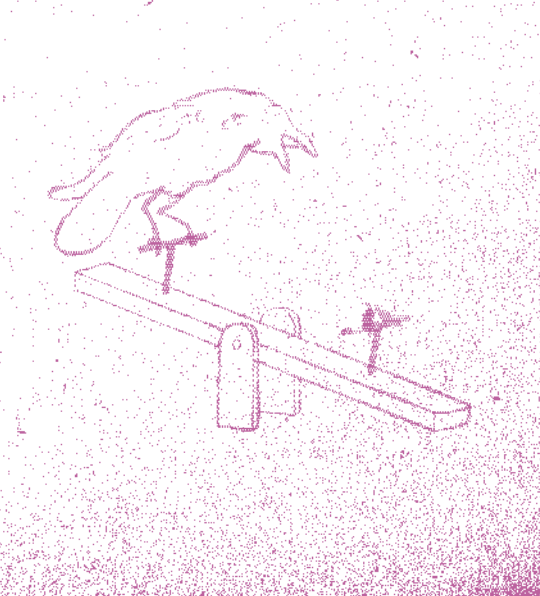


Justice Makers



Justice Makers

Justice Makers



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PAGAL CANVAS

IN CONVERSATION WITH

ABHAY JAIN

ABHINAV PANDEY

ABHISHEK KHUSWAHA

AJITESH PRIYADARSHI

AKSHETHA ASHOK

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TEJAL DEORA

VAIVASWATHA YAGANI

VANDITA MORARKA

VARUN HEMCHANDRAN

VIBHA NADIĞ

VIKRAM KUMAR

VINITHA JAYAPRAKASAN



IDEAS
THAT SERVE
JUSTICE

agami