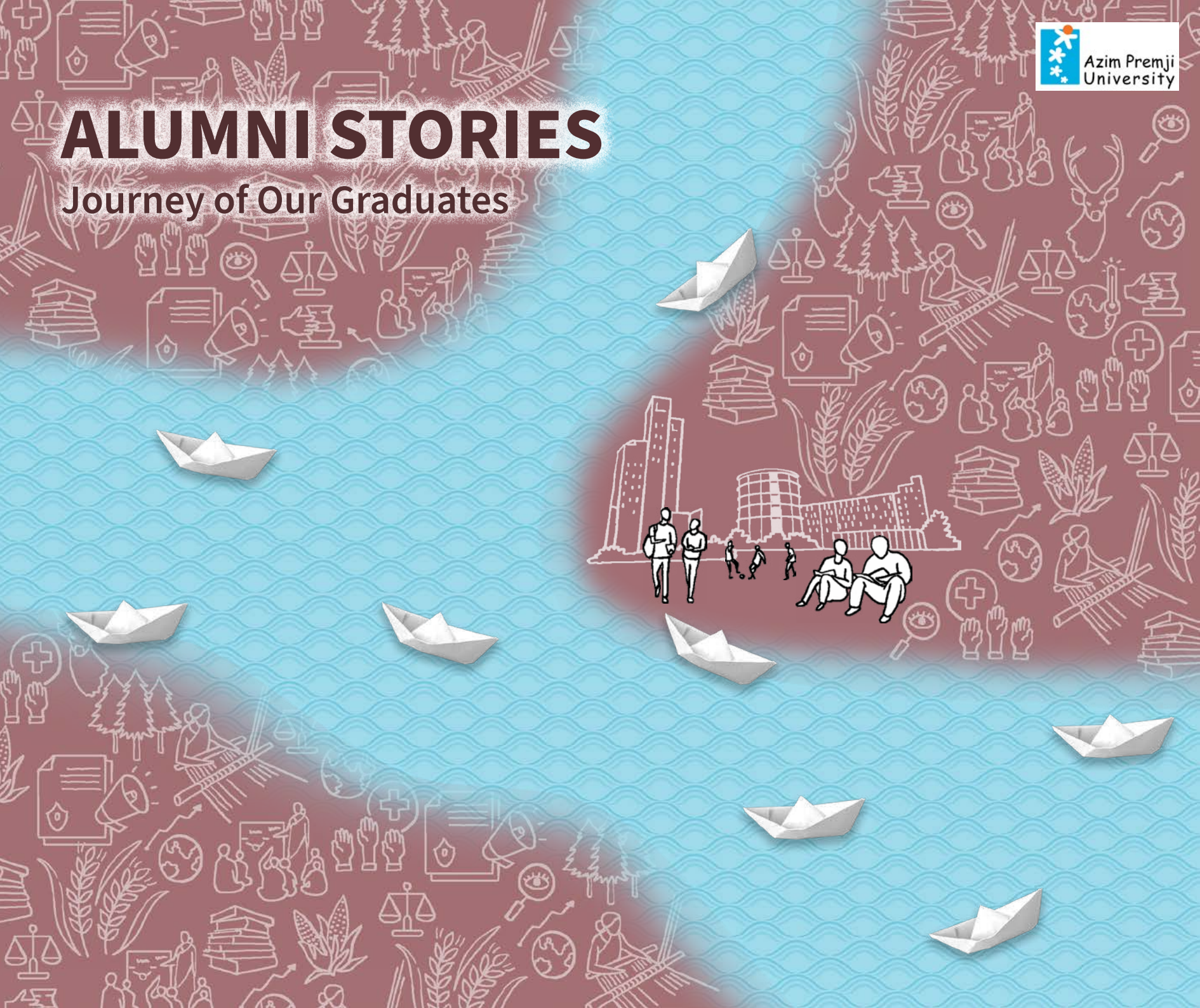


ALUMNI STORIES

Journey of Our Graduates



Vision

Education for Social Change

To contribute to the realisation of a just, equitable, humane and sustainable society



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May 2023

Dear Readers,

Announcing our new series, Journey of our Graduates, where students follow our changemakers, Alumni of the University, to understand the work they are engaged in while moving towards their larger goal.

Interactions with Alumni help us to understand their contribution to the University's vision of a just, equitable, humane and sustainable society. We continuously engage with them through stories, interviews and films as they are our ambassadors, working with the University's vision.

Thanking the enthusiastic team of student volunteers for taking care to compile these stories so carefully. And to our Alumni out there, stay connected and thank you for sharing, your stories make us proud!

We at the Alumni Office hope to facilitate many more such connections in the future on campus and online.

Warm regards,

Alumni Office

Azim Premji University





Bhushan Reddy

M.A. Development 2013-15

“Every problem has a multidimensional leg and I strive to empower grassroots communities to create sustainable solutions for society.”

Bhushan Reddy can be reached at nagabhushan.reddy13@apu.edu.in

*Story credit: Vaishnavi Deshmukh,
M.A. Development, 2022-24*

An Immersive Journey to Experience the Grassroots

Bhushan Reddy has been passionate about social work since his college days. Along with his friends, he founded a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in 2009 focused on environmental activities. However, his keen interest in understanding the broader realities of grassroots development prompted him to take the ICICI Fellowship Program, where he explored rural development and worked on watershed development. With an increased passion for rural development, Bhushan decided to pursue it professionally and joined the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University. While at University, Bhushan represented India at the ‘International Design Development Summit’ in Tanzania and interned at the National Innovation Foundation in Ahmedabad, where he conducted socio-economic studies of grassroots innovations.

Bhushan has a vast experience of working in the social sector across various domains. Currently,

he is associated with United Way of Hyderabad as an Assistant Vice President, working on fundraising and the overall development of the organization. He stated his career as a Channel Development Manager at SELCO Incubation Centre, a renowned social enterprise. Along with co-founders, he started his own section-8 company, Kaushalam Foundation, which focused on skill development in Rajasthan. He has also served as the CEO of Jaipur Rugs Foundation, where he was associated with the welfare of 40K artisans spread across five northern states of India. With an interest in disseminating information about the social sector, he started a website called www.devinfo.in. It provides information related to social sector jobs, fellowships, and NGOs and is one of the top websites on social sectors in India. Throughout his journey, he continuously pursued his hobbies of traveling, connecting with different people and cultures, networking, and quizzing.



Gopal Sukhadev Gunte

**Master of Laws
(Law and Development)
2017-18**

“Positive attitude leads to positive outcomes.”

Gopal Sukhadev Gunte can be reached at gopalgunte9@gmail.com

*Story credit: Isita Paul,
M.A. Development, 2021-23*

Be Bold, Dream Big

Gopal Gunte is an experienced advocate and a proud alumnus of Azim Premji University. His mantra of life is positive thinking which always keeps him motivated. Since 2018, he is practicing independently, and in addition to numerous civil and criminal matters, he is advocating at Industrial Court, Pune for a few labour unions as well. He is also empanelled as a legal advisor for Life Insurance Corporation of India, Pune. Gopal has earlier worked as a consultant with Augio Advisors Bangalore for monitoring and evaluation of the Rehabilitation & Welfare of the Prisoners project initiated by Tata Trust, Mumbai across six central jails in Maharashtra. During the lockdown, he fought many cases against wrongful termination or unlawful pay cuts in the labour and industrial court.

Gopal follows the learnings of Shrimad-Bhagvad-Geeta, is passionate about politics and a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He joined Azim Premji University for the Master of Laws

programme and terms this as a life-changing experience. The course gave an immense exposure to experienced faculty members, a diverse cohort, and an excellent curriculum with field exposure and everlasting bonds. Gopal shares how it improved his communication skills and increased his self-esteem as there was no judgment or discrimination from the other side. **He came across different ideologies which attracted him towards more liberal ideologies and learnt about the diverse culture and societal structure of India, realising that having opposing ideologies need not negate one another, rather the demand for progress must be met.** His knowledge of Law and practice was enhanced through the programme and helped him establish his independent practice after the post-graduation. This young man from Pune considers it a blessing that he found excellent mentors at every step of his life and wishes to apply their advice for more impactful work for society.



Amrita Varadarajan

M.A. Education 2013-15

“I don’t believe in hierarchy since it causes conflicts among communities.”

Amrita Varadarajan can be reached at amrita.varadarajan13@apu.edu.in

Story credit: Surbhi Kumari,
M.A. Development, 2021-23

Building Learning Capacities

“There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it’s going to be a butterfly,” Buckminster Fuller. Amrita holds this saying close to her heart. While completing her undergraduate degree, she felt the need to explore the development sector but prioritised education as a space to understand and work in. Initially, she worked in a consultancy firm but then decided to study further in education and joined Azim Premji University as the course structure and design fascinated her. She chose a specialisation in school organisation leadership and management which opened perspectives on systemic change and the nature of work she wanted to contribute to, in education.

After University, Amrita joined Kaivalya Education Foundation as it offered an opportunity to explore Communities of Practice within the government system through the District Transformation Program, currently known as the Aspirational Districts Collective. She started as a Program Leader in the central design team for district and

state transformation programmes on research, curriculum, assessment and program design as it scaled to 7 states and 28 districts. Over years, she managed the Foundation’s Organisation Development (OD) team working on performance management systems, culture change and change management projects. **This journey of 6+ years opened questions for Amrita around large-scale impact, system transformation, how to design meaningful workspaces for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), the correlation between culture and leadership development and talent management.** Currently, she is managing the north zone education partnerships at Wipro Foundation, where she feels privileged to co-traverse journeys with 25-30 education-based NGOs across 7-8 states. This allows her to explore organisational narratives, journeys, challenges and joys across the life cycle of an organisation while also allowing her to explore herself as an OD Practitioner, which is what she sees herself doing and being for the foreseeable future.



O Aishwarya

M.A. Development 2017-19

“If you are passionate about something, a disability cannot stop you from finding the answer.”

O Aishwarya can be contacted at o.aishwarya17_mad@apu.edu.in

Story credit: Surbhi Kumari,
M.A. Development, 2021-23

Disability is not a Barrier

Aishwarya is currently a Research Scholar at IIIT-Bangalore, pursuing her Ph.D. in Accessibility and Assistive Technology. Her research is focused on visually impaired persons, taking forward her idea that visually impaired persons can also draw and paint through partial appearances on canvas. As she reflects, “Our society wouldn’t believe that a visually impaired person can also draw or paint. However, I belong to that community, and I believe that it can happen.” She dislikes desk jobs and has always desired to work in the field to better understand the ground reality.

Aishwarya is glad to have pursued her M.A. Development from Azim Premji University as the University gave her the lens to understand that there is no easy answer for any social problem. **The theoretical and practical learnings at the University as well as her life experiences, gave her the clarity that she wanted to**

work for her community which faces discrimination in their everyday life. Sharing an anecdote of how our University accommodates the diversity of people, she remembers how at the time of her interview, she was asked about the type of accommodation she wanted at the University. This was a first-time experience For Aishwarya. Her search for an institution that is more accommodating of disabled people and not just eager to fill their disabled quota got over at Azim Premji University. The University taught her how to come out of her comfort zone. Post her graduation, she joined Vision Empower, a Not-for-Profit enterprise which empowers children with visual impairment through inclusive education, as an education coordinator. It gave her a chance to interact with more children who are visually impaired. This experience gave her the strength to think beyond and start a new initiative for visually impaired people.



Nayan Ranjan Kumar

M.A. Development 2011-13

*Listen to your heart, things
will fall into place*

Nayan Ranjan Kumar can be reached at
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Story credit: Isita Paul,
M.A. Development, 2021-23

Education for Social Change

Passionate about education and development, Nayan proudly holds 10 years of experience in this field. His guiding principle is to always follow what you feel is right for you and for others. This has led him to achieve where he is today. Currently, he is working at Aide-Et Action International that believes education is the answer to social change. As a Program Officer, he leads different teams of people across four states. They strive to educate and empower girls from underprivileged groups, such as the ragpicker community, red-light areas, and from tribal communities. He has been closely working with the government school system and his larger experience in the development sector also contributes to ensuring learning facilities, and skilling youth from most disadvantaged communities alongside young orphans & victims of conflict-affected areas.

During his graduation years, Nayan's curious mind questioned the social inequality in India as its present performance on human development metrics is not particularly encouraging.

His desire to give back to society compelled him to test his philosophy and to discover an answer, Nayan joined the M.A. Development program at Azim Premji University. This decision changed his life. He chose to come to this University with a commitment to social change despite having a good rank in the Common Admission Test for MBA course and a job offer from ICICI bank. An alumnus of the first batch of the University, Nayan recalls his days at Azim Premji University to be a fantastic experience. His exposure to a diverse cohort and great academic guidance from faculty made him choose his career path in development. Ever since then, he is working towards equitable opportunities and quality education for marginalised communities in India.

Nayan believes his grassroots experience has boosted his learning of real issues. **He hopes to work on state education policy development in the future and apply his knowledge to make sure everyone has fair access to education.**



Ashish Hemant Deshmukh

M.A. Education, 2017-19

“Empowering the middle management system will be the best way to achieve the basic competencies in students.”

Ashish Hemant Deshmukh can be reached at ashish.hemant17_mae@apu.edu.in

Story credit: Emilin Thomas, M.A. Education, 2021-23

Empowering the Middle Layer of our Education System

Ashish has been consistently engaged towards improving education at the grassroots. Currently, he works as a Project Associate at Leadership for Equity. Here, his primary role is to enable the mid-level managers of the education system such as Block Resource Coordinators, Kendra Pramukhs, Block Education Officers and District Institute for Education and Training (DIET) lecturers, through capacity building. In addition, he is involved in co-creating programmes centered around foundational literacy and numeracy. Ashish has co-led professional development training for mid-level managers and has executed a monitoring structure for a teacher development programme across 90 centres. As part of National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN) Bharat initiative, Ashish also works towards increasing community engagement in rural schools.

Ashish worked as a teacher at Nagpur Municipal Corporation School, before joining Azim Premji University to

pursue M.A. Education. He values the time he had at the University in terms of learning and the space for enabling him to interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Ashish recalls the insightful classroom discussions and deliberations he had with the professors and peers about the education system. He continues to engage in similar forms of dialogue and dissent even today, with his friends and colleagues. After University, Ashish worked with Samagra Shiksha in Telangana, as a curriculum and pedagogy consultant. He co-implemented various interventions of the state such as the Learning Enhancement Program, Shala Siddhi also known as the National Programme on School Standards and Evaluation which is an instrument for school evaluation and enrolment of out of school children. He was keen to work with government institutions as he believed **partnership with the government body is one of the most critical ways to reach out to the most deserving students**. During his free time, Ashish finds content in cooking, reading and listening to music.



Neha Mishra

M.A. Education 2015-17

“Children learn from how they live, if they live with acceptance they learn to love, if they live with shame, they learn to feel guilty. The idea is to create a world, where they blossom.”

Neha Mishra can be reached at
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Story credit: Emilin Thomas,
M.A. Education, 2021-23

Every Child Matters

Neha Mishra started her career in the education space as a journalist. A few events in the field as a news reporter left her unsettled and her quest for enhancing her knowledge of the domain pushed her to pursue M.A. Education from Azim Premji University. After pursuing her Masters, she joined Azim Premji Foundation as a Resource Person in Udham Singh Nagar district of Uttarakhand. Her learnings from the University have enabled her to connect theory and practice.

Today, she continues to work at the Foundation, as a teacher educator, particularly in the field of early childhood education. Having first-hand experiences working with young children has enabled her to empathise with the Anganwadi teachers and their challenges. **Along with her team, she is working towards the transformation of the Anganwadi centres as a learning environment through capacity building of Anganwadi teachers who are officially not**

recognised as teachers but as workers.

The Foundation adopts multiple modes like monthly sector meetings, workshops as well as a direct intervention at the centres and the latter is critical as the bright spots and challenges each Anganwadi possesses is diverse. These workshops equip the teachers with developmentally appropriate practices and techniques of play, storytelling, and rhymes as well as emergent literacy and numeracy skills.

As an experienced practitioner in the domain for more than six years, Neha was recently entrusted with the responsibility of the field faculty in the district institute of Udham Singh Nagar. She held lectures in the focus area of early childhood education under the M.A. Education programme. Her learnings from the programme broadened her perspectives on children and enabled her to understand both, how children learn and the developmental patterns in their early years.



Dechamma CS

M.A. Development 2015-17

“Real development happens at the crossroads of action and research.”

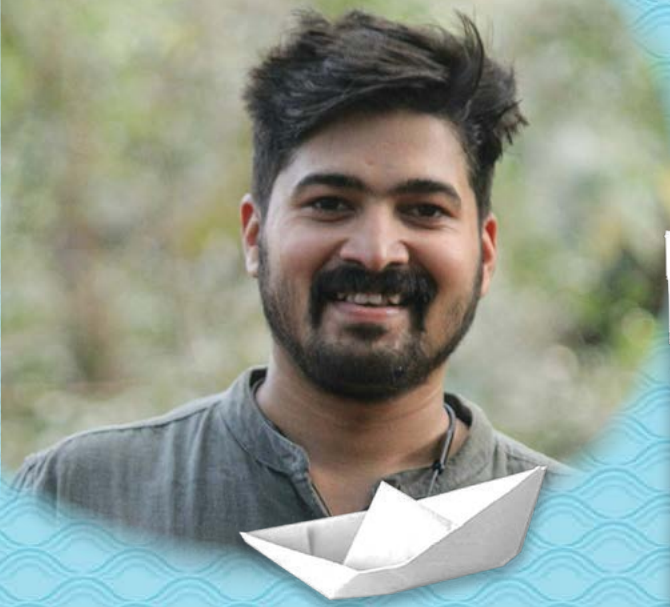
Dechamma CS can be reached at dechamma.cs15@apu.edu.in

Impactful Community Engagement

Dechamma works with Community Engagement Initiative of the Azim Premji University. A unique wing that is envisaged to work on improving human conditions around the University and closely connect members and students to field realities around the University. Her responsibility at the function is to manage projects under the theme of local democracy, public health and environment. In parallel, she holds the role of Programme Manager in restoring Burgunte lake as part of Corporate Environment Responsibility of the University. Dechamma mentors students on projects both curriculum and volunteer based, ranging from activating sub committees of Gram Panchayats to understanding public health system and many more. She thoroughly enjoys these roles as an administrator.

A deep interest for physics since childhood, made Dechamma earn a degree in Astrophysics. But as she grew up in Coorg in the heart of nature, she realized she wanted to study ecology and sustainability which was more relevant to her roots. She joined the postgraduate programme at Azim Premji University for the vast opportunities.

The University years were a whirlwind of understanding, learning, challenges, meaningful discussions and a lot of hard work. But Dechamma thoroughly enjoyed the process and the unique relationship it offered with her peers and the faculty. The course projects made strong interlinkage between classroom learning and field practices and her exposure to sustainability made her deeply passionate about Common Pool Resources. She joined MAPSAS-environment trust under Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike lake department managing close to 300 acres of lakes in Bengaluru. Here, Dechamma built a harmonious relationship with bureaucrats, communities and implemented several sustainability projects. She thoroughly enjoyed working in the grassroots but her interest towards research made her join Centre for climate change and Sustainability at the University. During the course, she researched upon common pool resources and published couple of papers in journals and has book chapters to her credit. In future, she plans to return to Coorg to take care of the coffee estates and work on sustainability issues.



Narayan Hegde

M.A. Development 2017-19

“The development lens has helped me in expanding my understanding of any system. I believe through innovation and research in the education system, we can provide enriching learning experiences for each child in every school in India.”

Narayan Hegde can be reached at narayan.s17_mad@apu.edu.in

Story credit: Jyoti Jangir,
M.A. Development, 2021-23

Leading the Leaders of the Education System

In his final year of degree college, Narayan got interested in the field of development. To further explore the field, he registered for the LEAD initiative at the Deshpande Foundation. His first work experience was trying to raise the consciousness for co-curricular activities and activity-based learning in the pre-primary educational system. To broaden his horizons and delve deeper into the field of development, Narayan enrolled in the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University. The field immersion filled with learnings and unlearning was one of the most amazing experiences of the programme. He had the chance to work at the grassroot level and gain a thorough understanding of it through field exposure. One of his key learning was a view on the socioeconomic and political aspects of any given circumstance. Anchoring this learning, Narayan joined Mantra4Change, Bangalore as a Cluster Transformation Lead.

“Any system entails multiple leaders, and it functions because of these leaders. My role involved locating these leaders from district to block level and assisting in transforming the education system curating the needs of every child,” says Narayan. His work involves working with schools and clusters towards improving the quality of education and continuous improvement across schools in Karnataka. Narayan has been leading various such school clusters through collaboration among stakeholders in the education system such as academic leaders, school heads, teachers, and the larger community by integrating innovations and research. He reflects that challenges are essential in certain ways as they probe you to think out of the box and come up with effective solutions. With the goal of establishing a supportive educational system, Narayan wants to expand the breadth and complexity of these modest initiatives for long-term projects.



Sushmita Patel

Master of Laws
(Law and Development)
2017-18

*“Small wins of the day make
up for longer term waits.”*

Sushmita Patel can be reached at
sushmita.patel17_llm@apu.edu.in

Mainstreaming Climate Change and Sustainability

Sushmita works as a Governance Fellow with the Government of Telangana, where she assists bureaucrats on issues of policy design and implementation. She predominantly works with the state's Climate Change Cell, on action plans and policy documents centering around climate action in the state. It is often indoctrinated right at the beginning of careers like this, that “change” is not a phenomenon that can be witnessed overnight, especially as an immediate outcome of this type of work. Whether it is working on rural commons or climate change, the cynicism that is associated with the need to accord priority to such issues in decision making, continues to be a hindrance. These do in fact pose a routine challenge in ensuring that the work finds a larger meaning and can contribute to impact.

After graduating from law school, Sushmita wanted an understanding of law and its applicability beyond its conventional confines. Her search for

an interdisciplinary understanding ended at Azim Premji University. The opportunity to interact with students from different programmes and take up electives from their domains offered her insights that she continues to utilise. It helped build perspective, tailored her outcomes and learnings, especially around environmental policy, in fact laid the stepping stone for her career. **Today Sushmita continues to work in the realm of environmental policy and natural resource governance with a focus on enabling participatory decision making in the same.** She is also a fellow with the Just Transition Research Centre, IIT Kanpur working on legal and policy regulatory regimes for a just energy transition in India. While another academic degree in the same field continues to be an option, her work would focus on assisting governments and decision makers in mainstreaming climate change and sustainability into everyday governance.



Kritika Singh

M.A. Education 2012-14

“University life stood for inclusivity and equality, values which I have tried to emulate in my own life and work. Hence, a large part of my work revolves around building a culture of trust and peace which makes school space inclusive and enriching.”

Kritika Singh can be reached at kritika.singh@apu.edu.in

Story credit: Jyoti Jangir,
M.A. Development, 2021-23

Nurturing Education in Conflict Zones

Kritika, like all children, never missed the chance to pretend to be a teacher, not realizing that one day she would earn a living in this profession. After graduating in History from St. Stephens College, Delhi University, Kritika worked in an ed-tech company and in a marketing job only to dislike it later. To keep her passion for education alive, Kritika joined the M.A. Education programme at Azim Premji University in 2012, a decision that defined the course of her life. At the University, she unlearned many constructs of the worldviews and interacted with some of India’s brightest minds, people with huge accomplishments yet a profound sense of humility. She says, “I learned theories and stories of transformations, tolerance, equality, and power. All this gave me clarity and a sense of purpose which I lacked earlier.”

After University, Kritika spent four years teaching social science at Aakash Institute, Srinagar. She built a loving

relationship with her pupils through stimulating and engaging discussions about major political theories, leaders, and historical viewpoints. Currently, she is the Principal of Dolphin International School in Pulwama, Kashmir. Working in this volatile region of Kashmir has given her a chance to understand the impact conflict has on the students, teaching community, and education’s active role in soothing conflict’s ill effects. Kritika’s mission has been to help the young, by equipping them with coping strategies. These strategies include introducing unconventional activities such as gardening and sports in the school curriculum to build a healthy student community. **She believes that in the environment of violence, the school has become the only safe space for the young and the old alike to express themselves. Hence, a large part of her work revolves around building a culture of trust and peace which makes school space inclusive and enriching.**



Titli Mondal

M.A. Public Policy and
Governance 2015-17

“My story is a testament to the impact of quality education and the importance of being socially conscious in our professional pursuits.”

Titli Mondal can be reached at
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Story credit: Vaishnavi Deshmukh,
M.A. Development, 2022-24

Policy at the Grassroots

Titli Mondal, in her own words, has come a long way since her graduation. Her academic journey began at Visva-Bharati University, Shantiniketan, where she completed her under graduation. But it was her time at Azim Premji University that she found truly transformative. Here, she was exposed to the complexities of the social and political landscape of India. Titli's coursework in public policy equipped her with the tools to critically analyse policy decisions and their impact on society. For her, the campus has helped her understand society and herself and has played a crucial role in shaping her career and helping her find her true calling. After graduation, Titli worked on sustainable development at Environics Trust, a research organisation and with Development Research Communication and Services Centre (DRCSC), an NGO that focuses on rural livelihoods and climate change. This exposure honed her understanding of the challenges faced by marginalised communities and

how policy decisions impact their lives. Further, having an interest in mental health and counselling, Titli enrolled for an internship with the Counselling Centre at Azim Premji University. This introduced her to the world of mental health and counselling and encouraged her to complete a second master's degree in Psychology from IGNOU. **Today, she works as a Medical Social Worker at a Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre in Nanoor, under West Bengal government. She works towards improving the health outcomes of malnourished children in rural areas.** Titli mainly focuses on acute malnutrition management in four blocks of Birbhum district where is responsible for screening children's health and referring them to the nutrition rehabilitation centre and play therapy for children. Additionally, she also offers online counselling services through My Fit Brain, an online platform, helping people deal with a range of mental health issues.



Soujanya Sridharan

M.A. Development 2018-20

“Reading is a skill that cannot be replaced. It is essential to make a difference.”

Soujanya Sridharan can be reached at soujanya.sridharan18_dev@apu.edu.in

Story credit: Isita Paul,
M.A. Development, 2021-23

Policy Research to find the Best Solution

Soujanya is a Policy Researcher working with Aapti for almost two years now. Aapti is a research institution working at the intersection of technology and society to find sustainable solutions. Soujanya is an avid reader and enjoys her work at Aapti thoroughly as it revolves around forging human-centric pathways to platforms and data governance, accumulating and analysing new regulations and best practices in the health sector across the world. She enjoys writing and this job has provided her with opportunities to write research papers, op-eds, etc. Prior to Aapti, she worked briefly with IT for Change, a Bangalore-based Non Governmental Organisation.

Soujanya joined Azim Premji University with a clear vision to contribute to the field of policy and development. With a triple major from Christ University,

this young working professional joined the M.A. Development programme for its multidisciplinary curriculum and excellent faculty. The variety of courses offered in the second year enhanced her learnings, the themes and subjects across the programme gave her opportunities to study courses that aligned with her interests. Soujanya shares that her Winter field Project with IT unions was an eye-opener for making career choices. Tech policy, being a moderately new sector, she dared to take a chance and look for job opportunities independently. And she is making her mark in the sector. **Soujanya values the importance of reading and recalls how conscious reading from classrooms has built her understanding of different concepts and issues in the field of development policy.** And she keeps reading whenever she can.



VNS Meenakshi

**Master of Laws
(Law and Development)
2020-21**

*“Find peace, live a slow life,
spread love and focus on self-
care. Patience and resilience
broaden your horizons.”*

VNS Meenakshi can be reached at
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*Story credit: Isita Paul,
M.A. Development, 2021-23*

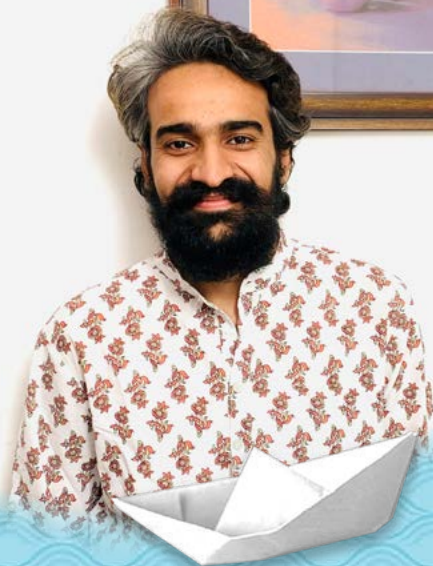
Reinventing the Intersections of Law and Development

Meenakshi is currently associated with Kelp HR which is working towards building a safe and inclusive workplace through simplifying the legal complications of Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) programmes. As an Advocate - gender and sexuality rights facilitation and legal consultation, they are excited to be a part of this institution. Their job involves training employees for POSH, designing modules for LGBTQIA+ communities to make gender more inclusive in the corporate world, and other associated legal documentation work.

After finishing her B.A. LLB from Damodaram Sanjivayya National Law University, Visakhapatnam, Meenakshi started working in all fields of law. Always passionate about understanding gender issues, they joined The Gender lab fellowship. Here, the exposure to development work made them curious about how they could combine society's legal and development needs. When they

found out that Azim Premji University offered an interdisciplinary curriculum through the LLM programme, the background in law and enthusiasm for development work interested them. The programme was completely online due to pandemic, and they regret missing campus life, but the online mode of learning did not interfere with their peer learning process. Instead, it made them digitally sound and added as a skill and is helpful as they are working remotely at present. The academically rich course content at the University and the multilateral approach improved their research skills, which is also where they want to focus in their career going forward. They want to explore gender and policies especially POSH across the globe.

This young professional aspires to seek independence for themselves and their peers, independence from stigma and wrongful conditioning, by focusing on mental wellness and acceptance of the universe and freedom of life.



Chirag Arora

M.A. Development 2020-22

“The University classrooms have modelled a space for listening to each other and sharing thoughts.”

Chirag Arora can be reached at chirag.arora20_dev@apu.edu.in

Story credit, Sakhil PS,
B.Sc.B.Ed. Physics, 2020-24

Story of an Altruist

Chirag is a freelancer working with many organisations. His work with Shaheed Virendra Smarak Samiti (SVSS), Panipat, a community-based organization, which works with the community towards supporting public school education and livelihoods of women through Self Help Groups takes up most of his time and energy. He supports documentation of reports, operational plans and team capacity building for a project in collaboration with WIPRO foundation. Chirag’s relationship with SVSS started as a student at Azim Premji University as he was deeply moved by the commitment of the volunteers working for the last 30 years towards building relationships with the community based on democratic ethics.

The second initiative, Sarjapur Curries, also came along during his field immersion during University. It’s a community kitchen garden focussed on reviving local greens and promoting organic farming where Chirag has

been volunteering and has engaged in various farm activities and has attempted to document one of the ongoing projects at Sarjapur Curries. He is also a part of The Career Coach, an entrepreneurship initiative that guides students and mid-career employees to identify a career path based on their value, personality, aptitude, and interest.

Chirag’s work across organisations as well as his years in the University has played an important role in overcoming social barriers and changed some of his perspectives. **“The University is working to build a community which is diverse in culture, language, tradition and identities and I learnt to understand others and work as a team.”** He observes and critically talks with his friends about how the identities embodied in our names, gender, native places, education, occupations, etc. concludes our role in the society and influences our interactions.



Pallavi

M.A. Education 2016-18

“A lot of time I feel that I am not doing things hands-on, then I realised if I start doing it, I am only one person, and we will not be able to create such a big team and make the required impact.”

Pallavi can be reached at pallavi.16_mae@apu.edu.in

Teamwork Matters

With an M.A. Education degree in hand, Pallavi started work at Piramal Foundation for Education Leadership (PFEL) as Programme Lead. A challenging first job indeed where she was responsible for improving the public education system by strengthening leadership as well as youth leadership building through mentorship of 6-7 senior fellows. Seeking to spread her wings and channelise her learnings from PFEL with greater autonomy, Pallavi joined Kshamtalaya Foundation as Operations Lead in Rajasthan lending strength to their programmes running in the state by supporting programme managers and their teams of fellows. She bridges the content created by the Learning and Growth team with those on ground ensuring flawless delivery. Interacting with funders and collaboration with government programmes is part of her role. Pallavi describes Kshamtalaya as a value-based organisation and resonates with their way of working on the model of demonstration of learning, integration of socio-emotional-ethical aspects of wellbeing, and advocacy for systemic response.

With a vision to help children realise their true potential through relevant, meaningful and compassionate education, Kshamtalaya works on integrated curriculum of language, maths, EVS, Sports for social change and Social Emotional Ethical (SEE) aspects of learning. COVID tested the team's resilience and encouraged new innovations to reach children through different means. Catering to remote tribal communities in southern Rajasthan, with no digital resources, they began with hamlet learning circles in open air centred on wellbeing and integrated learning. In parallel, they tied up with Radio Madhuban and created an Audio Learning Programme on their integrated curriculum as defined in SCERT Rajasthan and NCERT EVS. They also evolved a 21-day Hosla programme for the mental wellbeing of teachers.

Of most pride to Pallavi are the fellows and education leaders at Kshamtalaya who are locals from the community, a cadre of regional leaders leading educational interventions by bringing teachers, schools and community together and becoming role models for their own community.



Sagar Jain

M.A. Education 2015-17

“My perspective to see society has changed and it is helping in achieving my goal of comprehensive education for children.”

Sagar Jain can be reached at sagar.jain15@apu.edu.in

Story credit: Jyoti Jangir,
M.A. Development, 2021-23

The Light at the End of the Tunnel is Education

Becoming a doctor was Sagar’s childhood dream, but life had other plans for him. He decided to pursue a Bachelor of Science despite having no specific career goals. But in his final year, Sagar encountered something akin to experiencing light at the end of the tunnel. He had the opportunity to work as a school teacher for a while and became interested in the profession. As his interest in teaching grew, he transitioned from B.Sc. to B.Ed. course.

Sagar read in a newspaper about Azim Premji University’s M.A. Education programme and decided to enrol to deepen his knowledge of the educational system. He reflects that the two years at University were spent learning about the comprehensive approach to the educational system. Sagar headed the student representative community and participated in every University event. Being a member of the University’s peer support group in the Conversations

team, he says, “It helped me understand mental health better. I’m trying to apply these lessons while working with children.”

After University, Sagar joined Varthana as an Education Specialist in Indore and Agra and worked for 4.5 years towards the improvement of children’s education. Currently, as the Academic Excellence Manager of LEAD School (Ed-tech), Agra, Sagar maintains relationships with thousands of students and ensures improved learning results. He promotes implementation of the LEAD academic system that produces exceptional student outcomes and oversees improving the capacity and training of School leaders, Academic Coordinators, and Teachers in LEAD Partner Schools. **His long-term objective is to open a school where children may gain knowledge via application and technology-infused, activity-based learning.**



Sruthi Kutty

M.A. Public Policy and Governance 2017-19

“Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them- Assata Shakur”

Sruthi Kutty can be reached at sruthik237@gmail.com

Story credit: Methari joel Paul, M.A. Development, 2021-23

Towards Achieving Gender Equality and Inclusive Growth

Sruthi's tryst with the development sector began much before enrolling at Azim Premji University. She had worked on projects with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) as well as the Government of Maharashtra. Her experience working on state-led initiatives prompted her to apply for Master's in Public Policy and Governance at Azim Premji University. She chose the programme because she felt that the pedagogy, approach, and course structure offered by the school distinguished itself from those offered at other institutions. The approach to teaching, coursework and evaluation was a breath of fresh air because it did not adhere to conventional formats and allowed for a great deal of freedom and creativity.

Sruthi is currently working as a Programme Manager for the research vertical of Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE) at LEAD (under Krea University), which focuses on building evidence on women's economic

participation. Her work is centred around building a strong link between the research and advocacy portfolios to ensure that insight from the projects reaches the right platforms. She works with internal and external stakeholders on building IWWAGE's body of work and improving the visibility of issues concerning women's labour force participation rates. Previously, she has worked with UN Women and the Government of Kerala. Her work entails engagement with an array of subjects relating to gender justice and public policy. This includes women's economic participation, gender-responsiveness, policy making, and budgeting amongst others. The academic learnings at the University helped her in a great way; she shares that the Hub Project as part of the course was crucial in shaping several of her professional projects including research methods, stakeholder engagement, and strategy building. She also proposed the hub project to the Government of Kerala during her stint there.



Swati Nayak

M.A. Education 2012-14

“A journey of self-reflection and learning about the education system, leadership and organisations.”

Swathi Nayak can be reached at swathi.nayak@apu.edu.in

Transforming Education

Swati's work in educational leadership over the past nine years is one of growth and leadership. An Academic Head with Learning Links Foundation, making a difference in 26 Indian states through her educational products, Swati didn't plan this journey. She started her career as a Maths teacher and worked alongside at Eklavya Foundation doing in-depth research on content. A chance meeting with Rohit Dhankar led her to Azim Premji University for a life-changing journey. Realising her potential, personal growth through supportive mentors and faculty and a conviction that she can work in educational leadership are some of the extremely positive outcomes of her University years. Coming out of the University with a vision to bring change, Swati joined Primal Foundation where she worked with municipal schools in Maharashtra on School Leadership. Later she also designed the content for training and school education programs. She has also freelanced for a while to explore different educational institutions and NGO's in India.

Swati is presently working with Learning Links Foundation for over five years, taking care of Academic Content Design, Teachers'

Training, and Educational Program design for remedial students in elementary grades, for improving the overall quality of education in the School. Post covid she designed a new course, Learning Roots for Life, programme that includes a combination of remedial courses and a course to improve grade-level deficiencies.

Swati consistently works along with the learning and development team and program team towards improving the numeracy and literacy skills of children, conducting surveys before designing modules to understand the requirement of each region and create content accordingly. Her content has been translated into seven Indian languages and she is currently working for Gujarati and Hindi Language. Excitingly this has made her understand and speak many of these languages.

Finding fulfilment in observing learning outcomes through her modules, working on the ground with people in 20 states and 52 cities over years, Swati plans to document some of her work. Her mentor rightly calls her a general physician, one who effectively understands the nature of the system and have suggestive measures to improve it.



Tanneru Veera Narayana

M.A. Education 2013-15

“Discussions, dialogues and conversations are important to get multiple perspectives and arrive at the best solution.”

Tanneru Veera Narayana can be reached at tanneru.narayana15@apu.edu.in

*Story credit: Jyoti Jangir,
M.A. Development, 2021-23*

Understanding the Engineering of our Education System

Veera worked for 4 years as an Aircraft Maintenance Engineer before joining Azim Premji University. As much as this sounds fascinating, he always liked teaching children and thus followed his passion for education by joining the M.A. Education programme. Veera shares that the **University helped him understand things from multiple perspectives and stresses the impact of discussions with friends and faculty both inside and outside classrooms.**

After Azim Premji University, Veera has been associated with private, government and non-governmental organisations (NGO's). His work involved teachers' training, planning, monitoring, and evaluations, and closely working with stakeholders directly or indirectly related to the education system. He has mentored primary school teachers for their Diploma in Elementary Education and has organised teaching and learning material (TLM) competitions for school

teachers at the district level. Veera is a certified master trainer of the TEACH tool, a classroom observation tool developed by World Bank and has trained education faculty at the state level. He says that working across all three systems has clearly indicated that your locus of control over the system defines the work limits. Working with NGOs, Veera has gathered that programmes are being designed without properly taking the field realities into account which increases the burden rather than the resolution of the problem.

Currently, Veera is working as a senior technical writer in a private firm. He is motivated by his understanding that he developed during his programme at Azim Premji University and hopes to stay connected with his passion for education. With this he believes, even if he can count on a change in the life of a few children and their education, he will be content.

Your wings already exist....
all you have to do is
FLY



Varun Sharma

M.A. Education 2013-16

“Work with the people, not for the people.”

Varun Sharma can be reached at
varun.sharma13@apu.edu.in

Story credit: Surbhi Kumari,
M.A. Development, 2021-23

Understanding Theories Through Practices

Varun, an engineering graduate is passionate about working for the society. He started with teaching a group of adolescents in his native village who drop their studies and migrate to neighbouring states for work. His efforts helped retain 22 out of 25 children in school, but he wanted to explore many questions on education that troubled him. Looking for answers, he joined the M.A. Education programme at Azim Premji University as the curriculum really excited him. The University space, faculty and peers helped him deep dive into the fundamental questions surrounding school education and education for the marginalised communities. But Varun felt that the programme was too idealistic, and the learnings may fall flat on ground. To test this, he took a one-year break after this 3rd semester and joined the SBI Youth for India Fellowship. He worked with the Lanjia Saura tribal community in a remote village in Odisha with no network connectivity, road access, electricity and

language barrier. This made him realise how the programme had equipped him with navigating the unknown at the grassroots.

After University, Varun joined the Teach for India Fellowship. He also worked with the Transformation of Aspirational Districts Programme for left-wing extremism affected districts. Working with Lohardaga District Administration, Jharkhand for three years, he built a deep understanding of the public system, its strengths and weaknesses. **Currently, Varun is a Senior Fellow with the Government of Telangana. He is leading an in-house public policy team of ten Assistant Statistical Officers and Kakatiya Governance Fellows** that works across the Finance Department, Mines and Geology Department, Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (TSWREIS), Telangana Tribal Welfare Residential Educational Society (TTWREIS) and Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) where he oversees their work.

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