

Certificate Course: 'Rooted in Place, Flowing with nature – Bioregionalism in India' March 28–30, 2025.

The three day course was organised as a collaborative effort between ATREE Academy, Pitchandikulam Forest, Kalpavriksh, and the South Asian Bioregional Working Group (SABWG).

The course had 23 participants (Annexure A) from a variety of backgrounds and included students, designers, ecologists, artists, and researchers. People from across India and Nepal gathered in Auroville, in the Kaliveli bioregion, Tamil Nadu, to learn from six facilitators- Ashish Kothari (Kalpavriksh/Vikalp Sangam), Nisha Mary Poulouse (South Asian Bioregional Working Group), John Kurien (CDS, Trivandrum), Joss Brooks (PF-Auroville), and Asmita Sengupta and Pallavi Varma Patil (ATREE).

Rooted in Place, Flowing with Nature: Bioregionalism in India March 28-30 2025 @ Pitchandikulam Forests, Auroville (Tamil Nadu)						
March 28, 2025 Day 1	9:00-10:30 AM Welcome and introductions	10:30- 11:00 AM Break	11:00 AM - 1 PM a) Bioregion and Bioregionalism- conceptual clarity. b) Global south perspective of bioregionalism c) Nation State and Bioregionalism	1 PM- 3 PM Lunch	3PM - 6 PM Diverse perspectives of Bioregionalism- Conservation, Livelihoods, and Governance	6:30 PM Interaction with Kudde Foundation Music / free time
March 29, 2025 Day 2	6 AM - 5 PM Field excursion - Visit to Nadukuppam Village and the Kaliveli Bioregion. Lunch included.					
March 30, 2025 Day 3	9 AM - 10 AM Visioning bioregions for future	10 AM - 10:30 AM Tea break	10:30- 12:30 PM Visioning bioregions for future	12:30- 1:30 PM Lunch	1:30- 3:30 PM a) Decentralised governance of bioregions- case of Arvan Samad in India b) Constitutional framework and bioregions	3:30-4:00 PM Tea break 4-6 PM Reflections and Wrapping up DEPARTURE

Day 1 28 March 2025

The workshop began with an interactive introductory session by the facilitators. They were thereafter divided into groups and asked to answer a questionnaire designed by John Kurien after a short discussion amongst themselves.



This helped the participants to reflect on their own roots and bioregional understanding, including local practices, traditions, and words unique to their native place. The sharing included seasonal songs for harvesting, bamboo goddess worship rituals, and religious practices involving coconuts. This activity prompted participants



to also consider what makes their home region unique, emphasizing the importance of reviving local traditions and ecological knowledge in a globalized and increasingly homogenized world. In such a world, where local economies and cultures are weakened, bioregional approaches can offer local solutions to environmental issues, as opposed to one-size-fits-all approaches.



A lively discussion moderated by **Ashish Kothari** followed which encouraged participants to define a bioregion and tease out the distinction between administrative boundaries and natural ones. The session challenged participants to reconsider lifestyle

choices, models of democracy, and development paradigms. Participants explored how bioregionalism involves not only ecological factors but also social justice, livelihoods, politics, and culture. Ashish encouraged participants to name a few bioregions in their own languages. Key questions raised included: In the context of bioregions, how can we share resources equitably? Do we even need money? And, what are alternatives to capitalist and patriarchal systems?

In the morning break, participants shared food that they had brought from their own region, highlighting their cultural and ecological significance.



The workshop also explored the South Asian approaches to bioregionalism, in relation to western or global North notions. The perspectives are deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual contexts, with local communities being more directly dependent on their ecosystems " This distinction has significant implications for conservation and

community work. John Kurien emphasized that those who depend on ecosystems must advocate for their protection, while 'biosphere people' should help strengthen local people's movements and keep the broader ecological picture in mind.

Bioregionalism movements, when driven by local communities, foster a sense of responsibility and stewardship, and hold promise for addressing socio-ecological issues on a local scale.

Post lunch the group was taken on a guided tour of Pitchandikulam Forest in Auroville by **Joss Brooks** and Mani to get a glimpse of the approximately 70 acres forest. This self-regenerating sanctuary is

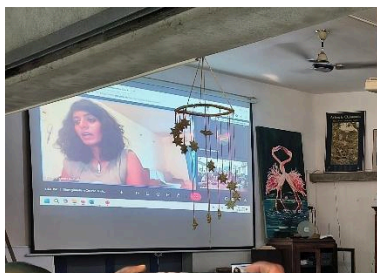


home to over 800 plant species, including nearly 340 medicinal varieties. Established in 1973, it has transformed from a dry, eroded plateau into a thriving ecosystem dedicated to preserving the indigenous tropical dry evergreen forest.

Asmita Sengupta's class thereafter was focused on a conservation perspective. She pointed out that for conservation to be transformative, it must address the root causes of environmental degradation, such as the disconnect between people and nature, the concentration of power, and the prioritisation of short-term and individual gain over sustainable co-management of natural resources for the benefit of whole communities.



Asmita spoke about the challenges associated with bioregional approaches to conservation giving examples of transboundary Protected Areas in Central America and conservation politics in the Sunderbans.



Nisha Poulose offered an online session and shared her work on 'uncovering pre-district bioregions in India,' emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach that includes ecology, culture, history, linguistics and local traditions, rather than solely focusing on ecological

zones for delineating bioregions. Administrative boundaries were transcended as cultural and ecological flows go beyond borders.

John Kurien then spoke about social movements and bioregions. Using homogeneous beads versus a diverse necklace as an example, he highlighted that people and interactions among them are as important as nature. He encouraged participants to guess which livelihoods are dependent on ecosystems and learn from their strategies of maintaining their ecosystems.



Punit Dhandhan from Kuddle Life Foundation

(<https://linktr.ee/kuddlelifefoundation>) highlighted efforts by his organisation to restore marine biodiversity through artificial reefs while improving the lives of coastal fishing communities in Tamilnadu. This showcased the power of passionate individuals working closely with local communities to restore ecosystems.





The day ended with a special dinner of Borscht Soup cooked in-house with bread and cheese sponsored by Kudde Life.

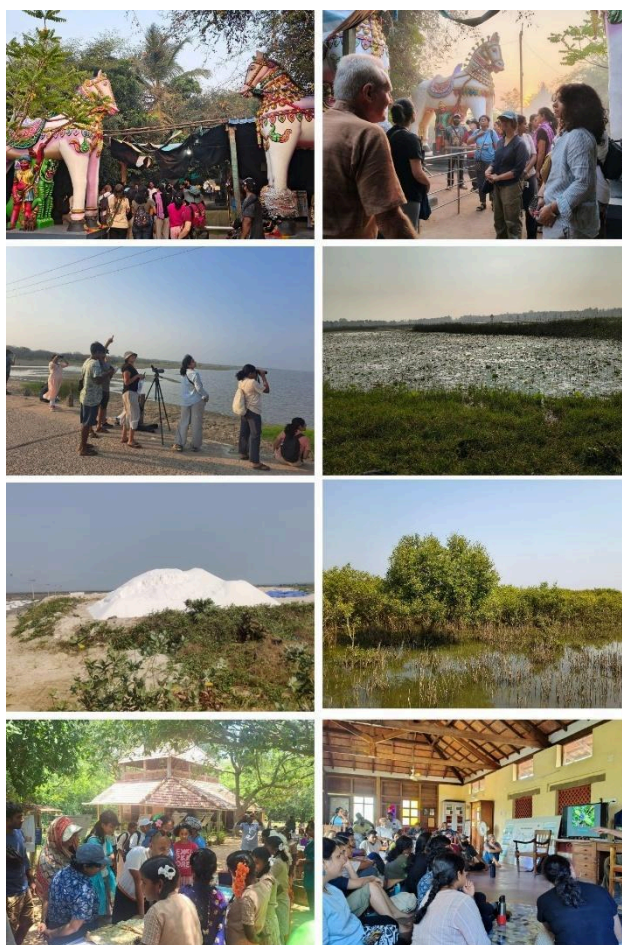
Day 2 , 29 March 2025

The PF team (**Joss, Mani, Auroline, Marie, Azagappan , Lourdes, Gopi**) organised a day-long field trip on the second day.

Participants visited various parts of the Kaliveli bioregion, including sacred groves holding the remnants of the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF), the Kaliveli Wetland, a mangrove restoration site, traditional salt pans, and the beach. They also explored Nadukuppam, a model village where Pitchandikulam Forest has worked for over 20 years to regenerate the tropical dry evergreen forest and support environmental education.

Their work in the local public school, which has been neglected in the past, has now seen major improvements in terms of hygiene, academic success, and environmental upliftment through the planting of trees on the former barren school yard and by incorporating environmental education into various fields of study such as art.

Participants also had the opportunity to witness the impactful environmental education initiatives led by the PF team at Nadukuppam Public School, where the enthusiastic students, through a traditional theatre performance, displayed their own rendition of the 'Bhakta prahalada story' in which 'prahalada' is the ardent devotee of mother nature. The story of the Kaliveli watershed was embedded in this performance. The children also exhibited small projects displaying their local ecological knowledge passionately.



The day ended with Joss Brooks giving a historical perspective and insight into his journey to start restoring the land, first in Auroville, then in the wider bioregion, and his background.

Day 3, 30 March 2025

The third and last day of the course started with a quick recall by all participants facilitated by **Pallavi** of the last 2 days.

The first half of the day was spent in a visioning exercise facilitated by **Ashish Kothari**, where participants imagined a bioculture-region-based future for South Asia. They explored diverse societal aspects, including governance, economy, culture, health, mobility, and ecology.

Participants actively engaged in the visioning exercise, presenting their ideas through various creative formats—such as a short play, a map highlighting the specific challenges faced by regions in South Asia and strategies for addressing them, or by taking a broader approach to envision a utopian South Asian bioregional collective.



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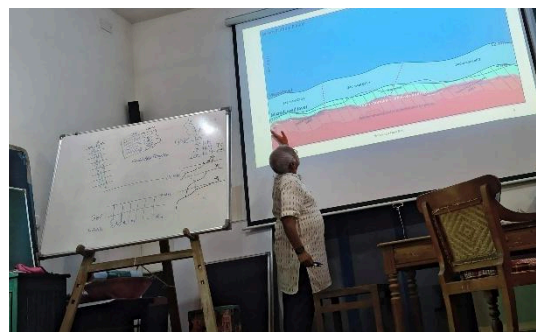
Pallavi Varma Patil took a class on 'bioregional democracy' with a real life example of Arvari Sansad or the 'River parliament'. After explaining the context of how a perennial river called Arvari dried up and then was revived using check dams/ Johads (a short film was screened in this context:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-qlyXE8KFc>); participants were encouraged to work in groups to come up with simple rules that can govern the revived Arvari river. They were asked to think of catchment areas, the livestock, the water quality, the

farming practices amongst other things. At the end, the group matched their rules with the actual rules made by the Arvari Sansad in 2001. One key aspect of the case study was also to explore the tensions around owning natural resources in India. Rivers come under state jurisdiction and here was an example of a community taking ownership of managing and governing the resource. Pallavi also briefly talked about the equity challenges that the intervening civil society organisation had to face when the Johads were being constructed with community funds. A brief discussion on Elinor Ostrom's principles followed this example.

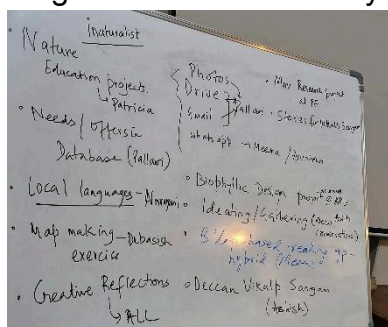
John Kurien then took a session about the coastal terraqueous

realm. This land-sea interface is a productive one - economically and ecologically - and John explained some key concepts such as the coastal area ecosystem and the sediment cell, as also traditional forms of community management that help in the governance of coastal zones. He elaborated on how boundaries within India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the sea are delineated and discussed which regions of the marine environment could be economically utilized by different stakeholders, such as local communities, Indian state fisheries, and international units operating in the broader Indian Ocean. John encouraged participants to read the Coastal Bioregion report



(<https://in.boell.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/webbing-a-new-net.pdf>).

During the 2nd half of the day everyone contributed to a large canvas of words, phrases, and drawings on Bioregionalism initiated by **Ashish**. The canvas will travel to other bioregion workshops through Kalpavriksh and the South Asia Bioregionalism Working Group. The last session was about possible follow up actions such as creating an offers and needs group, offering nature education services to each other, translating this course into other languages, being part of the South Asian Bioregional Working Group, and ways to keep in touch (whatsapp/ google group).



We ended the day with certificate distribution by Joss on behalf of ATREE,

Overall, the workshop underscored the importance of bioregionalism as a holistic approach to sustainable development, inspiring participants with stories of hope—whether it was the restoration of tropical dry evergreen forests and wetlands by Pitchandikulam Forest, the environmental education initiative in Nadukuppam, Kuddle Life's work in revitalizing marine ecosystems through artificial reefs, or the exploration of alternative pathways to the current system.

As Ashish Kothari put it: "Bioregionalism is about cultivating a deep sense of belonging and responsibility to the places we inhabit, ensuring that both people and ecosystems thrive together."





Thank you!

Testimonies shared on Social Media:

[Diya Hafiz](#)

Last weekend, I found myself at a course I never imagined I'd attend—but am so grateful I did. The Bioregionalism Course in [Auroville](#) brought together an incredible mix of thinkers, practitioners, and dreamers from varied disciplines and regions, all bound by a shared curiosity, hosted by [Pitchandikulam Forest](#) (PF), [Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment](#), [Kalpavriksh](#), and the South Asia Bioregionalism Working Group. This isn't my usual domain. But something about Auroville's spirit and the credibility of ATREE made this hard to skip. And I'm so glad I didn't. Over three days, I was immersed in a completely different kind of conversation—one where people spoke of rivers and coastlines, spiritual geographies, and alternative worldviews with an urgency and hope that felt almost radical. From the shift in historical language (BC/AD → BCE/CE) to understanding bioregions as not just ecological but deeply cultural, the course encouraged us to reframe how we think of land, place, and belonging. Among my takeaways:

1. . The term bioregionalism itself—often rooted in Western ecological thought—was reimagined through South Asian lenses, emphasising not just livelihoods, but spiritual and ancestral relationships with land.

2. 2. I learned about transboundary protected areas like the Siachen Peace Park (Sia-A-Paz), which propose peace through ecological cooperation.
3. 3. I was especially moved by the work of [Kuddle Life Foundation](#), who are creating artificial reefs along coastal India—reviving marine ecosystems while simultaneously supporting fishing communities with sustainable livelihoods. An inspiring example of ecological restoration meeting economic resilience.
4. And then there were moments that defied bullet points: — Walking from sacred groves to salt dunes, to estuaries and the sea, with every landscape telling a story of interdependence and care.
5. — Watching schoolchildren at Nadukuppam Public School reimagine the Prahalada tale as one of devotion to Mother Earth.
6. — Listening to Joss Brooks invite us to "tune into the land", and realising that bioregionalism is less about managing nature and more about letting nature shape us.
7. This experience reminded me that there is no single way to relate to place—and that's the point. The land holds multiple truths, and our work is to honour that multiplicity.
8. A heartfelt thanks to all the facilitators and co-participants for creating a space of deep learning and listening.

[Aditi Lokhande](#)

Last weekend I had the opportunity to attend an unique, one of kind course on [hashtag#Bioregionalism](#) at The Pitchandikulam Forest (PF) - Auroville who organized an immersive journey through the Kaluveli Bioregion for us.

Our field visit began at a sacred grove in the early morning, followed by explorations of a wetland where we did birding, explored the local marshland, estuary, backwaters, mangroves, salt dunes, and finally landed up on the sea!

We also had the opportunity to witness the impactful environmental education initiatives led by the PF team at Nadukuppam Public School, where the enthusiastic students through a theatre performance displayed their own rendition of the bhakta prahalada story in which prahalada is the ardent devotee of mother nature.

The founder of PF, Joss Brooks invitation for us was to connect to the land and invoke the energy of the land. As I went through this process in the 3 days I explored

the landscape and tuned into the whispers of the trees, I felt a gentle embrace from this land that has been shaped with the labour of love and seeds of transformation.

[Pitchandikulam Forest](#) in [Auroville](#) spans approximately 70 acres. This self-regenerating sanctuary is home to over 800 plant species, including nearly 340 medicinal varieties. Established in 1973, it has transformed from a dry, eroded plateau into a thriving ecosystem dedicated to preserving the indigenous tropical dry evergreen forest. Experiencing a restoration/regeneration project at this scale was mindblowing.

Can not wait to be back again and traverse many such bioregions across the country. To explore the idea of a bioregion through the sensing of the environmental and cultural factors that influence the functioning and boundary of an ecosystem is a fascinating idea for me. Thank you to amazing facilitators for the lovely experience [Pallavi Varma- Patil](#), [Ashish Kothari](#), John Kurien, Joss Brooks, Asmita Sengupta and [nisha mary poulose](#)

Appendix A: List of Participants

(Ignore the highlighted section please !:)

1. Ateen Das
2. Meera M Panicker
3. Harsh Vasava
4. Mukur Ganguly
5. Diya Hafiz
6. Shambhavi Mishra
7. Amshuman Dasarathy
8. Kiran Kumār
9. Swatee Saberi Upadhyay
10. Preethi Sreenivasan
11. Aditi Lokhande

12. Theertha Ravindran
13. Patricia Rose Owens
14. Sagnik Roy Datta
15. Mithra Karthikeya
16. Bhavna S
17. Arunima Abraham
18. Gautam Shanbhag
19. Dipti Hingmire
20. Debashish Satpathy
21. Narayani S.
22. Lavanya Nandi
23. Joshua Danesh

Four last-minute cancellations due to unavoidable personal reasons: Gautam, Sumit, Pavneet, and Priyanka.