

Innovation in Praxis

# The Invisible Dimensions of Systems Transformation:

## Field Notes from Social Field Cultivation in the Law and Justice Sector in India

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### Abstract

In response to the growing complexity of sustainability challenges, field catalyst organizations are emerging across sectors such as health, education, finance, and law. These organizations seek to foster systemic transformation by bringing together diverse institutional actors. While much attention is given to strategy and structural collaboration, many such initiatives fall short by neglecting the invisible, relational, and awareness-based dimensions of collective action—referred to as the social field or social soil in the Presencing and Theory U framework. This article presents an action research inquiry into how Agami India, a field catalyst network, is cultivating the social field to enable systems transformation in the law and justice sector. Grounded in the application of Social Presencing Theater (SPT)—a methodology that offers both a framework and embodied practices for cultivating the social field—the study draws on seven years of fieldwork, practitioner reflection, and fourteen deep-dialogue interviews with participants of the Agami Shala (immersive leadership journeys). It

illustrates how cultivating interiority, presence, and relationship supports a shift from ego-stuckness to ecosystem consciousness. The article culminates in a grounded, practice-based practitioner framework for cultivating the social field, rooted in the principles of natural ecosystems and Indian spiritual wisdom on universal consciousness.

## Keywords

social field, field catalyst, 4D mapping, Social Presencing Theater, ecosystem consciousness, Indian spirituality, law and justice, Agami

A seed finds its roots  
and becomes the tree  
it was born to be.

The tree finds its home  
and becomes the forest,  
where it belongs fully.

The forest comes to life,  
thriving in harmony  
with all its siblings.

The field softly smiles,  
breathing in its rich soil,  
breathing out life with deep generosity.

## The Call from a Fragmentation Field

Several years ago, I was invited to design a rural marketing hub for grassroots women entrepreneurs in India. Fourteen leaders from various businesses and social enterprises/NGOs sat across two round tables. Each table was given a flip chart and asked to build two 3-dimensional models of the hub using Lego blocks, clay, pipe cleaners, and pebbles.

The table of business executives quickly collaborated on a single joint model. However, the table of NGO leaders and social entrepreneurs hesitated, then tore the chart paper into eight pieces, each building their own model with limited resources. Concerned they had misunderstood, I offered a fresh sheet and encouraged them to create a joint model. To my surprise, they resisted, insisting their approaches were too different to unify.

As I stood between the two tables, they mirrored a deeper systemic challenge: the stark contrast between monolithic business and government institutions that default to centralized power and a fragmented civil society sector struggling to build collective agency.

When I shared the story in another cross-sectoral forum, a young district collector readily agreed, "It's so difficult to bring NGOs together to make any change happen." My friends from the NGO sector echo this frustration, pointing to deep cracks in the field—*competition driven by limited funding, donor-imposed*

*thematic silos, and the relentless pressure on social entrepreneurs to prove their models.* One leading entrepreneur admitted he spends 75% of his time fundraising. Another young woman broke down, confessing she's been so caught up in this race that she has not visited the community in three years.

The result? A sector too consumed by survival to see the whole picture—small wins, but a more significant collective loss, with leaders burning out before systemic change can take hold. All this while the Earth heats up and communities suffer.

Significant efforts have been made in the past decade to bring diverse actors together for collective impact, giving rise to a new breed of organizations—Field Catalysts (FCs) (Hussein et al., 2018). These include multi-stakeholder partnerships, social innovator fellowships, funding-driven collaborations, cause-driven compacts, institutional coordination frameworks, and business or policy-led alliances. Over the last 20 years, I have had the opportunity to work with many such organizations and have been inspired by their genuine efforts to convene stakeholders and foster difficult conversations. Some even create deep relational spaces in small groups. Yet, most struggle to build lasting collaborations that sustain long enough to transform entire systems. While there are remarkable examples, the field on the whole remains fragile and fragmented.

## **An Invisible Dimension: Insights from Social Presencing Theater and Theory U**

Learning Social Presencing Theater (SPT) with Arawana Hayashi gave me a language and practice for exploring this phenomenon (Hayashi, n.d.). SPT is a social art form that integrates mindfulness, movement, contemplative theater, and systems thinking to help us embody and sense the “stuckness” and emerging future of any social system.

Through SPT, I experienced two key aspects of a social ecosystem—the Social Body and the Social Field. In any social system, whether a family, a group of teenagers, an organizational team, or a network of stakeholders, the Social Body refers to the visible structure: how we gather, our physical positions, levels, proximity, and directions. The Social Field, on the other hand, is the invisible, felt-experience of relationships—how members of a social body connect with each other and the space as a whole (Hayashi, 2021).

Otto C. Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer explore this theme in their new book, *Presencing: 7 Practices For Transforming Self, Society, And Business*—“A social field has a visible part aboveground (the tangible part of the system) and an invisible part below the surface: the social soil—that is, the qualities of awareness and relationships that people in a system operate from” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2025, p. 3).

This insight helped me recognize the struggles of many field catalysts, communities of practice (CoPs), and organizations that focus primarily on building visible structures while neglecting the invisible social field. While

“structural” efforts like stakeholder engagement, leverage-point identification, data gathering, and policy-building are essential, their sustainable success depends on cultivating an often-overlooked social field—the invisible relational fabric that shapes the quality and impact of collective work.

Arawana Hayashi further adds that “awareness” is what weaves the social body and social field together. In the Indian spiritual context, this may be referred to as our collective consciousness or how we collectively become aware of the visible and invisible dimensions of the social phenomenon. As our quality of awareness shifts from viewing others as competition or resources for our ego-driven agendas to recognizing each other as integral parts of the whole, the social field also transforms from being fragmented or transactional to becoming caring and transformational.

In the following section, I will share our insights on cultivating a social field with the Agami, a Field catalyst organization which is committed to transforming the law and justice system in India.

### **Social Presencing Theater (SPT)**

Social Presencing Theater (SPT) is a body-based art form and awareness practice that helps individuals and groups sense and actualize their highest future potential through mindful movement and embodied presence. SPT brings together eight foundational practices, grouped into four areas:

- *Embodiment and body awareness*, like the 20-Minute Dance, helping participants connect mind and body through stillness and movement.
- *Field awareness*, through practices like Field Dance and Village Practice, allowing participants to sense the invisible social fields that shape collective creativity.
- *Personal transformation*, using practices like Stuck Exercise and Seed Dance, to embody challenges and crystallize emerging futures.
- *Collective transformation*, with practices like 4D Mapping, where large groups embody stakeholder roles to sense systemic pain and possibilities.

Learn more about Social Presencing Theater at [www.u-school.org/spt](http://www.u-school.org/spt) or see applications in contexts like Agami at my blog [www.sacredwell.in](http://www.sacredwell.in).

## Journey with Agami

### Co-Initiation (What Brought Us Together)

Sometimes, I feel that if we hold our questions long enough, the universe creates opportunities for us to learn.

In 2015, Supriya Sankaran (then Director at Ashoka India) invited Sonali Ojha, a maverick Social Entrepreneur and Ashoka Fellow, and me to design immersive retreats for Ashoka Fellows using Social Presencing Theater (SPT). Over the next four years, the three of us guided around 80 Social Entrepreneurs (or "Changemakers") through the "Reframing Journey" from ego-stuckness to eco-consciousness.

During one of these workshops, we were creating a live stakeholder map (or 4D Map) of the system's current reality (see Presencing Institute, n.d., for more on 4D maps). I asked participants to embody the role of various stakeholders like government, funder, community, family, etc., and explore how they interact with each other. Supriya stepped in to embody the role of a social entrepreneur. As she tried to orchestrate the actors and the whole system to move, it hit her that "no actor was waiting for my direction. Each one was already directing their paths and moving. In that moment, I realised that to truly move the system, one has to be able to weave the visions and intentions of multiple actors together" (Dialogue Interview, January 17, 2025).

In other words, Supriya realized that we need to attend to the social field.

Over the next few years, Supriya discovered others asking similar questions, including Sachin Malhan, and together, they co-founded Agami, a field catalyst organization that connects ideas and people working to transform the experience of justice in India (Agami, n.d.).

Agami had a different start compared to Ashoka. One, Agami's focus on the law and justice sector provided a necessary container for cultivating the social field. Two, Agami created an ecosystem to invite changemakers on an immersive leadership journey, Agamishaala, and to co-create system-transforming innovations.

As Sachin Malhan puts it, "While Agamishaala (the leadership development journey) offers the critical rite of passage for holding the community together, other parts of Agami foster deep care and relationships that help cultivate this social field. The Agami Prize identifies new Agamishaala members, Agami Projects provide space for innovation, and the Agami Summit or Mela creates a platform for the larger community to see and sense the field. Together they help the system shift from scarcity to abundance" (Dialogue Interview, March 20, 2025).

With this foundation, Supriya invited Sonali Ojha and me to cultivate the social field within Agami through Agamishaala and the Agami Summit/ Mela (Agami, n.d.-a; Agami, 2024).

## Invitation and Challenges (What Built Our Foundation)

Supriya had curated the essential elements: a sectoral focus, a group of passionate changemakers, and a sense of openness to start the work. But a bigger question loomed: How do we enable field shift in a sector that is proudly stuck at level two listening—factual, analytical, confrontational, and siloed?<sup>1</sup>

Sitting together, we reflected on our struggles and the learnings from the Ashoka prototype that could inform our next steps. Sonali Ojha, in her quiet way, synthesized our insights into three guiding principles:

1. Invite those at an inflection point in their professional journey—those longing to break out of their silos and engage with the larger ecosystem;
2. Take a vertical dive—boycott level-two, analytical, and ego-based engagement, instead, collectively sensing into systemic challenges;
3. Create space for integrating our insights with the external ecosystem, ensuring that inner transformations translate into external shifts.

We launched our first immersive journey with 19 passionate changemakers from the field of law and justice. A year later, the pandemic hit. We nearly let go of the effort—until Artika Raj, Co-creator of Agami, stepped in. She inspired Sonali Ojha and me to co-create a hybrid version of the journey, grounded in cultivating mindfulness and resilience amidst the COVID crisis.

But soon after, we lost Sonali Ojha. Perhaps we will never fully recover from that loss. A part of me believes she has not gone but has dissolved into the field, living on through the work we bring into the world. And somewhere, her spirit inspired Artika and me to carry forward this journey over the next seven years.

## Inspiration (What Keeps Us Going)

Over the last seven years, we have embarked on immersive year-long journeys with six cohorts, each culminating in collective gatherings (reunions) that nourish the field. Today, we are a closely-knit community of over 100 changemakers—committed to each other's successes, rapidly sharing ideas, and showing up for one another through personal and professional challenges. This deep trust and selfless spirit to serve the sector's transformation are contagious, shaping our gatherings in ways we could never have imagined. We continue to show up as ecosystem stewards at large community learning forums like the Agami Summit and Mela, strengthening our collective impact.

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<sup>1</sup> Level two refers to levels of listening and attention articulated by Otto Scharmer. See <https://www.u-school.org/offerings/apply-levels-listening>.

It's heartening to see how participants join Agamishaala as seeds or trees and, over the long journey, transform into thriving forests. Many of them find a newfound assurance in sharing that: I am not just a small player; I can see my role in shaping and serving the whole ecosystem, and I can also appreciate others' contributions. Some participants have also undergone profound shifts in their roles, moving from enterprise leaders to ecosystem conveners. For instance, Akshay Roongta, a startup founder, discovered how he could expand his role to help social impact networks convene better. The journey inspired him to co-initiate the Alliance for Conserving Freshwater Ecosystems to bring focus, collective effort, and action to protect and conserve inland water ecosystems in India.

Numerous bilateral collaborations and partnerships have emerged along the way where members support or join others to expand their ecosystem impact. One such example is Rohit Sharma, who co-founded Awaaz Leadership Labs with support from Anshul Tiwari and fellow Agamishaala members to build an ecosystem where law students can bring fresh ideas to transform the field of law and justice.

Agamishaala has played a pivotal role in catalyzing multi-stakeholder collaborative innovations, unlocking collective agency. One such initiative, PUCAR (Public Collective for Avoidance and Resolution of Disputes), is transforming the dispute resolution experience of every Indian through many innovations, including India's first 24x7 ON Court in Kochi (PUCAR, n.d.). PUCAR initiative emerged from the social field cultivated by Agamishaala to address the unparalleled crisis that India's judicial system faces with over 58.4 million cases pending nationwide, as reported by *The Hindu* (The Hindu Bureau, 2024). *The Times of India* highlights that the Supreme Court has a record 83,000 pending cases, and High Court pendency has surged to 6.2 million cases, a 33% increase since 2019 (TNN, 2024). In its early days, Agamishaala offered a space for diverse dispute resolution leaders to set aside roles, connect deeply, and engage openly with differing views. Supriya, who co-facilitated the cohort, noticed a shift in energy and relationships in the months that followed. She reflects, "Agamishaala played a critical role in building the relational foundation and trust needed to sustain and grow this difficult mission (of PUCAR). This retreat was instrumental in enabling participants to collectively own the purpose of the initiative, significantly accelerating its progress" (Dialogue Interview, January 17, 2025).

## Field Notes—What is the Social Field Teaching Us?

Seven years hence, I sit with our core team, our field notes spread before us. We reflect—what are we learning about cultivating the social field?

In reflection, I must also acknowledge, along with Sonali Ojha and Social Presencing Theater, two other sources that deeply inspired my work. One is the Indian spiritual wisdom on transforming ego-centered striving into ecosystem

consciousness.<sup>2</sup> It gives deep grounding to my work as an awareness-based systems change facilitator and has been the undertone of Agamishaala design. The other is nature—a lifelong source of inspiration. This connection comes partly from my father, a farmer and forester, and partly from my own early childhood spent in forests. Nature forms the foundation of much of my creative work. Together these sources shape my approach in conscious and unconscious ways.

When I view the social field through nature’s lens, clear parallels emerge—The Fragmented Field, like a barren desert, isolates and depletes, leaving people lost and stagnant. The Transactional Field, like rocky terrain, breeds exhaustion through rigid exchanges. The Relational Field, like a nurtured garden, fosters trust, care, and belonging. The Regenerative Field, like a thriving forest, sustains itself, allowing communities to flourish with flow, reverence, and emergence.

I often wonder: how can we transform the fragmented social field of law and justice into a regenerative ecosystem? Looking back, I see a virtuous cycle—a three-phase journey that gradually cultivates this regenerative social field—curating the seeds, cultivating the field, and co-evolving the ecosystem.

I am sharing three field notes in the hope they will speak to the hearts of practitioners and action researchers who read them. I call them "field notes" because they are the notes I have been writing to myself and sharing with my team. They emerge straight from my heartfelt experiences, and I hope they will speak to the hearts of practitioners and action researchers who read them. You might notice that each field note feels like a direction, containing three parts: What—A principle or insight; How—The practices that bring it to life; Examples—Real-world instances where we have seen it in action, based on 12 dialogue interviews I did with Agamishaala participants and Agami leaders.

## Field Note A: Curate the Seeds

I first learned the word curation from the Agami team. Curation is the process of identifying and organizing different elements to reveal a bigger picture. In a social context, it means bringing together leaders from diverse backgrounds to represent a microcosm of our social system. This is a crucial step before we begin cultivating the field. Curation involves two key principles:

### *Identifying Diverse Pioneers at an Inflection Point*

We seek individuals ready to transition from ego-driven leadership to ecosystem stewardship. One guiding question we ask is: If you feel like you're hitting a wall

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<sup>2</sup> A detailed exploration of Indian Spiritual frameworks based on conversations with Dr. Samata Vashisht are published in my article “Alchemy of the Heart” (Srivastava, 2025a).

and can't move forward, would you consider joining us? This invitation resonates with those longing to break free from their current patterns and engage at a deeper level. Throughout the year, Artika continues to scout around the country, connecting with people who can bring diversity to enhance each other's inquiry and experience at Agamishaala.

Over the years, we have expanded our scope to invite leaders like Akshay. When invited, he could not see himself directly working in the domain of law and justice. Although, he felt that “I was at a right transition point, feeling unsettled as a leader. The Agamishaala team saw my diversity as a gift to the cohort. The journey helped me to up my game as a leader and inspired me to engage more deeply with others as a network weaver” (Dialogue Interview, April 15, 2024).

### ***Creating Curiosity and Shared Intention through Dialogue Interviews***

The Agami Team conducts in-depth dialogue interviews without revealing details about the workshop design or process. Instead, we simply ask: Are you willing to join us with the shared intention of transforming the law and justice sector? This approach serves as a filter, ensuring that those who step in are truly committed to the purpose and open to stepping into the unknown.

Carefully curating a diverse cohort does the work even before we start the gathering. As one of our participants, a senior government official reflected, “at Agamishaala, I met people from different fields, perspectives, ages, groups, and knowledge bases. I was able to break my own barriers of thinking in a structured fashion and engage beyond hierarchies” (Dialogue Interview, April, 2025).

### **Field Note B: Cultivate the Field**

The cultivation of the field begins the moment all participants come together at the Agamishaala retreat. However, this journey continues throughout the year, or even years. While we may use various practices and rituals, four underlying principles guide us in cultivating the social field (Figure 1.0). These principles have been inspired by Indian spiritual wisdom on being, belonging, and becoming one with the Universe. When I integrated nature's principles of cultivation with Indian spiritual wisdom it offered me a simple 4 steps framework:

|                             | <b>Individual (Inner Work)</b>   | <b>Collective (Relational &amp; Systemic Work)</b>   |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Awareness shift (Grounding) | Being—Preparing the Soil of Trust (Creating a safe and brave space for personal renewal) | Belonging—Rooting in Relationship (Developing deep, authentic connections)                             |
| Agency shift (Serving)      | Becoming—Flourishing with the Forest (Activating personal agency as ecosystem stewards)  | Building Beyond—Regenerating the Whole Ecosystem (Inspiring collective agency in service of the whole) |

*Table 1: Four Principles of Cultivating the Social Field (Manish Srivastava)*

***Being—Preparing the Soil of Trust (Creating a Safe and Brave Space for Personal Renewal)***

Curating the seeds is not enough if we do not have relational soil fertile enough to nurture conversation, relationships, and innovation.

In the natural world, we begin cultivating the soil by clearing the ground, composting the old, and adding organic matter, air, and moisture to let it breathe life. Likewise, we need to prepare the social soil by clearing past judgments, composting our ego and stuck patterns, and enriching the ground with trust, care, and generosity. In other words, we must create a safe and brave space where participants feel secure enough to engage in courageous conversations, self-reflection, and collaboration—essential for transforming the field.

In the initial gatherings, I was unconsciously preparing the soil. Only when I interviewed some participants for this article did I realize the profound importance of cultivating the soil of trust. Almost all of them acknowledged that the facilitation style, which is non-threatening and non-agenda-driven, creates a space where people trust each other. This implicit trust helps them to show up for one another on short notice. The shared experiences of embodiment activities helped them be vulnerable and develop this trust.

When people arrive, there is often an unspoken doubt and distrust, shaped by past experiences in gatherings where they had to defend their positions and where convenors imposed a dominating agenda. At Agamishaala, we consciously disrupt that pattern through practices designed to cultivate trust—both at the beginning of the retreat and throughout the journey.

- We do not have a fixed agenda or expected outcomes. This creates an open, nonjudgmental space and allows personal agency to engage naturally. There is no pressure to perform or produce an outcome, making it easier for participants to trust the process and each other.

- We avoid formal introductions, dissolving (or composting) ego identities and inviting participants into a shared space of presence and connection. Embodiment work becomes a leveler. By not asking people to talk about their work, we help them relate at a deeper level. Anshul reflected on his first experience, “There were no introductions—we directly went into a 20-minute dance (an embodied activity where we alternate between stillness and movement in silence for 20 minutes on the floor). But when we got up, we felt we were in a safe space” (Dialogue Interview, April 4, 2024).
- We create rituals of mindfulness, embodiment, and intimate reflection that shift awareness from conceptual frameworks to a felt, embodied social experience. This opens both mind and heart to trust and acceptance. Anshul added that “it created a space where I felt safe enough to look at my ‘stuckness’ honestly” (Dialogue Interview, April 4, 2024).
- We engage in nonverbal, movement-based group activities that invite spontaneous play, creating a safe space to compost ego-stuck patterns into fresh insights. As one of our changemakers Lubhyathi Rangarajan noted, “We connected in silence, sharing personal experiences. This created a deep level of trust” (Dialogue Interview, April 18, 2024).

At first, participants are surprised by our unusual approach, but soon, they begin to relax and simply be themselves. As the Agami Team puts it, *our approach disarms participants of their habitual patterns and prepares them for ecosystem consciousness.*

### ***Belonging—Rooting in Relationship (Developing Deep, Authentic Connections)***

We have learned that relationships are not built through visible exchanges but through invisible connections and resonance—just like the mycelial root network that cultivates the field for forests to emerge. We have seen this deep network of connections emerge through the following social embodiment practices:

- *Non-verbal social body experiences:* We engage in non-verbal activities like Duets or Village practices. By letting go of verbal exchanges, we expand our awareness to connect with each other. Sensing each other's presence through our hearts and whole bodies, we cultivate a deep appreciation of each other's whole being and the social space in between. This creates an unspoken connection that is not dependent on the stories we bring. As our participant, Sampat Mandaarapur, says, this is

where “deep bonds are created” (Dialogue Interview, April 4, 2024).

- *SPT activities like "stuck"* help us embody our personal challenges collectively within a small group. Without words, we can more deeply sense each other's struggles and longings. We share a collective experience of vulnerability, which creates deep empathy. As Anshul reflected, “We all felt stuck, and we connected deeply in our challenges” (Dialogue Interview, April 4, 2024).
- *Stepping into our field of the future*: We invite participants to embody their field of the future and ask others to become supporting elements. This creates an embodied memory of being part of someone else's vision. This joyful energy and commitment continue beyond the retreat. Aditi Kim Karolil, Agamishaala Curator, often says that after Agamishaala, “We feel a deep sense of joy in supporting each other and manifesting our potential” (Dialogue Interview, April 25, 2025).

These shared embodiment experiences create a deep sense of belonging and commitment to the shared purpose. Anshul acknowledges,

I have never felt as invested in any other community as I do in Agamishaala. It is the best cohort I have ever been part of. We are all connected for a reason beyond work. It is a personal and vulnerable space. We are connected on the level of a living room. It's genuine and authentic. We don't have to put on a facade. There is no competition. (Dialogue Interview, April 4, 2024)

Sampat Mandaarapur, from the Indian Prison Services, adds, “Government awards don't really recognize what I am doing. The people at Agami always do. They give me their full attention. Because of this, I feel very committed” (Dialogue Interview, April 4, 2024). He further adds, “Embodiment activities are at the core of this experience. There are no filters. We are not trying to impress anyone. There's no hidden agenda. It is very different from our daily lives. We don't wear any masks. Even a few minutes of such engagement can be more impactful than 15 years of work” (Dialogue Interview, April 4, 2024).

### ***Becoming—Flourishing with the Forest (Activating Personal Agency as Ecosystem Stewards)***

In natural ecosystems, every part inherently senses the whole. As we cultivate the field, a distinct ecological body emerges. The forest's canopy not only shapes but also protects, creating the conditions for the soil and ecosystem to thrive. I have always wondered: What, then, is the social equivalent of this canopy that nurtures and enables a social ecosystem to emerge?

Social Presencing Theater serves a similar role by allowing participants to see, sense, and embody the whole system deeply. Through practices like 4D Mapping<sup>3</sup>, individuals step into the roles of various stakeholders—not just observing but feeling their struggles, aspirations, and interconnectedness.

For Vikram Hiresavi, the activities expanded his perspective: "My view is generally limited to wildlife conservation. At Agamishaala, I was exposed to other people's viewpoints. I learned a lot about people working on social justice. It developed my relationships with other members, which led to effective partnerships" (Dialogue Interview, April 19, 2024).

Seeing and sensing the whole ecosystem works at multiple levels. One, the participants become aware of their role and responsibility in shaping the whole. This activates their personal agency. They also start appreciating how others are contributing to the journey, and this creates the basis for collaboration. Finally, they can rest in this awareness that they are not alone in transforming the ecosystem and this creates a sense of collective well-being.

As Rangin Pallav Tripathy shares,

Noticing myself as a part of a social body has become a central part of my work. I realize, as a Professor and Registrar in a University, my actions do not happen in isolation. Social body awareness has helped me stay calm and avoid frustration or agitation when things don't go according to plan. I feel much more at ease. (Dialogue Interview, April 18, 2024)

Members not only sense their role in the ecosystem; they become the ecosystem. This shifts identity from isolated actors to a collective social body—a forest of solidarity. As this awareness deepens, leaders naturally emerge as ecosystem stewards, fostering care for each other and the whole.

Akshay reflected on his journey:

The Stuck exercise<sup>4</sup> had a direct impact on my work as a leader. I started delegating more and letting go. The Stepping into the Future (Seed Dance) helped me clarify my role as a connector between various domains and organizations. I have put the drawing from the activity on my wall. It inspired me to renegotiate my role from being a facilitator of a project to becoming a partner and weaver (networker). Over the years that initiative turned into the Alliance for Conserving Freshwater Ecosystem. Network weaving has become an important part of my practice that I want to build further. (Dialogue Interview, April 15, 2024)

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on 4D mapping pls see <https://www.u-school.org/4dmapping>

<sup>4</sup> For more about Stuck exercise please see <https://www.u-school.org/stuck>

For Anshul, founder of Youth Ki Awaz, the embodied activities worked like a reminder: “I could see everything that I was not and wanted to be. I took a drastic decision at work. It transformed the way we were engaging so far” (Dialogue Interview, April 4, 2024). He is now stepping into a global ecosystem development role by being on the Global Safety Advisory Board of Snap Inc.

For others, ecosystem consciousness helps them see their own role differently and inspires new collaborations. Lubhyathi reflects on this:

One of the most powerful takeaways for me was the insight that embodying is different from enacting. I have learned to embody my profession as a lawyer and researcher, to embody the theory. I am able to perceive and go several levels deeper. The exercises helped us to be creative in a non-scary way. (Dialogue Interview, April 18, 2024)

### ***Building Beyond—Regenerating the Whole Ecosystem (Inspiring Collective Agency in Service of the Whole)***

A social field becomes truly regenerative when it taps into a deep source of collective renewal and unlocks its collective agency. Over the years with Agami, I feel that the regenerative source of a social field lies in its connection with the collective heart (Srivastava, 2025b).

In Live Stakeholder or 4D mapping sessions during Agamishaala, we sometimes touch a collective wound. An intuitive silence fills the room. In acknowledging our shared helplessness, it feels as if we are part of the same heart, beating together.

One moment that stands out for me is the Agami Mela in Bhopal, held against the backdrop of the 40th anniversary of the Bhopal gas tragedy (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2024).

On the second day, a spontaneous and intense dialogue emerged, confronting unresolved questions about the gross injustice caused by the tragedy—surfacing deep anger, naming unspoken truths, exposing the failures of capitalist institutions, the State, and development organizations, while recognizing the vital yet often overlooked role of movement-based groups in demanding accountability.

The weight of history made it an overwhelming space to hold. Sachin recalls the experience as

a crisis that acted as a rite of passage for us. However, because of our immersive experience with Agamishaala, we were willing to stay with the discomfort, willing not to judge others hastily, willing to heal and let others heal, and willing to stand for our truth. We did not dismiss anything others said. We did not make it about us versus them. We were all collectively committed to

listening to each other in the face of confrontation and creating a new kind of field. (Dialogue Interview, March 20, 2025)

In such moments, we develop a collective capacity to care for each other despite our differences. Sachin adds that such experiences help us to “relate to each other's work and purpose with deep care. When we see others work as part of our system and our work as part of theirs, our collective agency is truly activated.”

This collective agency is based on deep friendship that has a unique quality of presence. Or as Sachin puts it poetically,

In such a friendship, there is the wisdom of the third. Apart from you and me, there is a third being or the field itself. Therefore, it is not just that we care for each other—we care for this whole. We are able to settle in silence with this awareness of the third being. The quality of relationships that we cultivate is the game changer for cultivating the social field. (Dialogue Interview, March 20, 2025)

Sensing the “third being” or the collective heart unlocks a collective agency that serves the whole ecosystem. Unexpected collaborations, where leaders across highly bureaucratic and rigid institutions partner with technology innovators and civil society activists to create radical transformations for the community, can only happen when all of them have been through a shared experience and connected with the collective heart—a deep longing to serve those who suffer the most. It creates an unspoken commitment that brings people back, time and again, as if they long to drink from the same sacred source that inspires us all to serve.

Akshay reflects that “When I go to other gatherings or conferences, I find their soul or lifeblood is missing. At Agamishaala it is the deeper human to human connection and vulnerability that creates trust and shared intent to transform the field” (Dialogue Interview, April 15, 2024). Sampat, who has been attending all our gatherings, put it beautifully that, “Agamishaala reinstalls my youthful idealism” (Dialogue Interview, April 4, 2024). Anish Andheria calls it “a dopamine shot taken collectively. Within half a day, we opened up our hearts to the level that we could not do with a psychologist even after months of sessions” (Dialogue Interview, April 19, 2024).

I suspect many return to our gatherings for this very reason—to reconnect with the collective source of purpose. Or, simply, to connect with the collective heart.

## Field Note C: Co-Evolve the Regenerative Ecosystem

The transformative generative spaces are powerful yet delicate. While we may be able to create right conditions in a retreat environment, however, as soon as individuals leave the retreat and re-engage with the outside world, the habitual patterns of society take over. They may feel lonely, lost, and heartbroken. This saddens me, and I have always wondered how we can cocreate an ecosystem that is genuinely regenerative, one that begins to take care of itself. Fortunately, the Agami Team shares this concern, and together we started investing time and resources to make this vision a reality. While there is a lot of work we need to do in this area, here are some of our initial field notes on how, once we have cultivated a generative social field, we can evolve a regenerative ecosystem.

### *Create Spaces for Cross-Pollination and Innovation*

The Agamishaala team, Artika and Aditi, have tirelessly created various formal and informal spaces enabling community members to meet in-person and reconnect with social embodiment practices, nurture relationships, and encourage collaborations. The Agami ecosystem facilitates this process on three levels:

1. *Agamishaala United:* We invite all cohorts to come together in collective embodiment practices, allowing different streams to merge into a larger river. This is a joyful community space where members reconnect with their own cohort, the larger community, and the deeper purpose of our movement. At times, we embark on sensing journeys to explore other aspects of the ecosystem, which in turn helps us gain deeper insights into our own reality.
2. *Informal Support Spaces:* Throughout the journey, we encourage and support the creation of small, rapid, and informal spaces where members can come together to support each other. These spaces may take various forms, including online or in-person gatherings, coaching circles, city meetups, online forums, or innovation retreats.
3. *Community Gatherings:* We invite all participants to co-hold large community gatherings such as the Agami Summit and Mela. These events provide an opportunity to engage with the broader law and justice community—up to 700 people—where members can test and apply their ecosystem learnings. These spaces allow cohort members to practice what they have learned in an open field and then reflect on their experiences within their own circles.

We realize that our approach is very different from the practices followed by the rest of the sector. It is therefore important to create space where participants can find a community to strengthen their practice. Lubhyathi touched this need in sharing that

Agamishaala is counterintuitive to the way we work as lawyers. We have been taught to be suspicious. I realized that it was impeding my own growth. At Agamishaala, I learned the power of deep listening. It gives me space to practice that. (Dialogue Interview, April 18, 2024).

After every such forum, we hold a check-in call with the facilitation team and select community members to sense what the field is teaching us and explore how we can evolve. This approach mirrors nature's principle of adaptation—embracing disruptions and cross-pollinating ideas at the edges.

### ***Allow for Emergence***

Creating a regenerative community and guiding a social movement is challenging work with insufficient funding. This raises the question: How can we cultivate a space for self-flourishing communities? However, this inquiry poses a paradox: attempting to create a regenerative community may hinder its natural emergence.

In other words, true regeneration happens when we step back and allow it to unfold organically. This requires us to let go of outcomes, anxieties, and expectations, which is incredibly difficult for two reasons. First, there is external pressure. Funders often seek tangible stories of collaboration or impact. While this is a valid concern, it can create outcome anxiety. Second, there is an internal struggle. Those of us involved in shaping these spaces—people like me—feel a deep need to know that our efforts have made a difference. However, as soon as we begin expecting specific results, we risk interfering with the natural process of emergence.

Consider a forester attempting to make a forest self-sustaining through external interventions. Will the forest ever truly thrive on its own? Likely not. In trying to ensure its independence, the forester may unintentionally create dependence instead. Similarly, natural and social ecosystems regenerate in their own time and space. The wisdom required is to trust in this process.

Our long-term champion, Sampat warns us, "do not try to scale. If you try to scale, we will not succeed." He reminds us that "regenerative work is slow. We need to keep doing this. We are at the beginning." Anshul confirms the same, urging us to "continue the work. A hundred people is not enough" (Dialogue Interview, April 4, 2024).

At this stage, our role as facilitators must evolve—we become stewards of the larger ecosystem. Our direct interventions lessen. Instead, we focus on tending

the social soil, creating rituals and spaces where the community can come together. We allow for self-organization, offering support only when needed.

This is also the moment to identify and invite natural weavers and facilitators from within the community. We can support them—perhaps even funding their travel or time—to help them step into leadership roles. This intentional yet subtle guidance enables a smooth transition.

Letting go does not mean abandoning our efforts. Rather, it means committing to long-term ecosystem stewardship. And for this role to be truly effective, it too must be resourced and funded over time.

### ***Shift Attention to New Fields and Cultivate a Parallel Connected Ecosystem***

A key lesson from the Earth's biosphere is that ecosystems thrive through deep interconnection. The same applies to social systems—true regeneration requires weaving multiple, interconnected ecosystems.

We must resist building isolated “islands” and avoid limiting our journey to a few cohorts of Agamishaala. Instead, we need to keep stepping into new fields, inviting fresh cohorts of law and justice pioneers to cultivate thriving social ecosystems. Over time, we must reconnect these groups, strengthening a living network of social fields.

Our expansion has led us to welcome not only legal professionals—lawyers, judges, and scholars—but also those from related ecosystems: media, journalism, technology, innovation, and government. The recent Mela revealed an even greater need to engage leaders from people's movements, organizations, businesses, and public administration.

As some of our members point out, the civil society sector may resist engaging with those within the government and business sectors. That may be the reason that membership from these sectors has been significantly low. We may first need sector-specific journeys before bringing them together across sectors. We must also remain intentional about keeping these ecosystems connected over time.

A regenerative social field is not an isolated island of excellence—it is a network of islands that constantly evolves through connection and renewal.

### **What Lies Ahead and Where Do We Struggle?**

In reflecting on my hopes and messages for fellow stewards, co-creators, and funders of the social field, I would highlight:

1. *The Pace of Transformation:* We often misunderstand the natural rhythm of change, expecting short-term results for long-term challenges. Conditioned by a capitalist system, we see time as linear and assume that impact must be immediate. Yet, just as a forest takes time to regenerate, cultivating a social field requires patience. The early stages may seem slow and demanding, but transformation eventually emerges through unexpected collaborations, identity shifts, and breakthrough innovations. True systems change is not about speed but depth. If we trust in the organic unfolding of change, we allow stronger roots to form.
2. *The Invisibility of Process:* Much like the mycelial networks beneath a thriving forest, most of our work—nearly 80%—remains unseen. The deep cultivation of the social field happens out of sight, yet we live in a world driven by fundable, tangible actions. We must create space for observation, presence, and care. A forester does not rush growth but spends time witnessing the land. Likewise, honoring the silent, nonverbal dimensions of change is essential to sustaining a regenerative field.
3. *Non-Linear Outcomes:* Transformation does not follow a straight line. When members experience deep collaboration and innovation, they rarely point to a single moment of change—it is the entire journey that shapes them. Like a thriving ecosystem, regenerative change does not emerge from isolated interventions but from nurturing the whole field. A farmer practicing permaculture does not cultivate a single tree but tends to the entire landscape, trusting that it will support whatever wishes to grow.
4. *Fragmented Social Fields:* Not all soil is ready for regeneration. Some sectors—like defense, rigid bureaucracies, or some corporate spaces—are too fragmented, too dry for social innovation to take root. Just as deserts and rainforests regenerate differently, social fields require unique approaches based on their context. Understanding these differences allows us to adapt, applying strategies that respect the natural conditions of each space rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all model.
5. *Overprotecting the Ecosystem:* There is a danger in over-curating what we build. As funders, facilitators, and stewards, we may become too attached, shielding our ecosystems from struggle instead of allowing them to co-evolve. We must

remember that we are in service of a wild, self-sustaining forest—not a carefully manicured garden in a private valley. True resilience comes when we allow ecosystems to embrace both challenge and renewal on their own terms.

## A Moment of Gratitude: Power of a Layered Container

As I write the final words of this paper, I find myself wanting to honor what holds it all together. And that is the power of a layered container. Looking back at our journey, I feel deeply grateful for the many containers that make transformation possible. By "container," I mean a group of people who share an intention and create the conditions for change. These containers are layered, each supporting the others in holding the collective intention.

The first container is the design and facilitation team—currently Artika, Aditi, and me. We are responsible for curation, design, facilitation, and community building. This requires deep intention—how we hold attention, support each other in surfacing unconscious assumptions, and embody the principles we practice. Before each gathering, we spend one to two days in inner preparation to show up in service.

Another container is the participants, especially those who return to support new cohorts. We set a shared intention with them and engage through pre- and post-event calls. I'm specifically grateful to all those who supported me to write this article.

The larger Agami team—Supriya, Sachin, and other ecosystem leaders—forms another layer, creating platforms for cross-pollination and emergence. Cultivating the social field with them is essential, and we are becoming more intentional about creating shared spaces.

Then there are the enablers—funders, idea-partners, and well-wishers—who trust us as ecosystem stewards without imposing rigid demands. I am deeply grateful for their belief in this work.

Beyond them is an even larger container—stakeholders and partners in the field, some close, others distant, yet all holding the intention for transformation. These “Friends of Agamishaala” provide spaces, offer vital services, and help in unseen but essential ways. Over time, we’ve identified a network of individuals—like earthworms and birds—who nurture the ecosystem’s growth. We’ve honored them in different ways, but the time has come to create conscious spaces for them as well.

Finally, I'm grateful to Presencing Institute for their generous support—especially Arawana Hayashi and Angela Baldini, who have been my “practitioner container”, holding space for my growth and nurturing the courage, compassion, and creativity, I needed to show up and serve wholeheartedly.

Engaging with systems transformation work from the lens of “cultivating a field” brings tremendous humility. It brings deep reverence for the Earth and all the beings who are creating this experience. I realise that I am only a small

player in the larger ecosystem. Yet I'm significant and the choices I make have an impact. And therefore, it is a call for each of us to be, belong, become and serve the field.

The seed opened its heart,  
Held me gently in his palms  
And said, "We have all we need—  
The soft soil and the warm sun—  
Will nurture our soul  
You and I make each other whole  
Let us trust the longing to be free  
And serve the world  
By being the plant  
We were born to be

—Manish Srivastava, *Midnight Journey of a Seed:  
Pathways to Resilience in the Face of a Crisis*

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