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REPORT OF THE '21 LET'S MAKE A DIFFERENCE' DECEMBER GATHERING.

Venue: Asia Plateau, Panchgani.

Dates: December 24th to 27th, 2015.



PREFACE

This “**21 gathering**” marks two decades of nurturing, mentoring, and guiding youth from across the country and developing them into competent, broad minded and capable individuals who even today serve and live by example in the society at large.

Since 1994, the coordinating team has been the backbone of the IofC youth wing-LMAD. And they have been responsible in organizing and conducting every event whether it is at the regional level, the national youth conferences (at Asia Plateau) and the very recent Air India workshop that was conducted in the year 2013. The Air India training program marked LMAD’s foray into the corporate sector. And this team comprises of a network of more than two hundred women and men of a mixed age gap and various professions, spread out far and wide across the globe from a very top notch city like Chicago in the United States, to India’s financial capital Mumbai and to a very small town like Baramati that is nestled on the outskirts of Pune. One of our members also comes from the Free and Autonomous Region of Tibet.

Similar to today’s trend, all of them first came as participants and later took on the mantle of becoming coordinators to make a difference in the lives of their fellow youth. As participants they too experienced a deep, profound and revealing life changing moment during a youth camp. Choosing to never look back after that defining moment they leveraged what they had learnt and changed their lives for the better. Today, each one of them is raising a family and is successful in their personal and their professional lives. And they still wear the teachings of LMAD in their day to day life and also inspire people around them. **They are also the reason why the team has grown in terms of size and strength across the country.**

The team has also been involved and been in touch with the workings for the last 21 years. The main purpose of bringing them all together under one roof was to discuss new ideas about the future of LMAD, room for improvements and innovation, and taking the work to another level all together from where it currently is. **Many of them have also expressed interest in coming back to help and also getting back in touch with the institution and the team at large.** And we were counting on their experience and knowledge to guide the future generation of coordinators. As they were coming with their spouses, our intention was also to introduce the spouses and children to the wonderful institution of IofC and its workings. Thus, building a connection and expanding the reach within the family. More than 87 coordinators and their spouses attended this workshop.

And as always, we also aimed at bringing back the timeless and core foundation of the teachings –Quiet Time, to the gathering at large accompanied by writing and sharing.

And a dedicated team of 27 young girls and boys from across India (one young lady came all the way from Kenya) helped organize this 21 gathering to make it a grand success. They attended a workshop prior to the gathering to learn about coordination, team work and other areas of the event. This workshop prepared them for the amount of work that was required and like the crew of a ship, each one contributed and worked towards setting the ship for the three day journey.

A lot of thought was put into the conception and execution of this gathering. As always, our main focus was on the key takeaway and delivering value with no compromise on the standards of the program. It was therefore decided to divide the day into three parts- the early morning session would touch the **soul and conscious**, the mid-morning session of 10:00 am would engage the guests at the **mind and intellect level**, in the afternoon session a **design thinking workshop** which would be devoted to formulating an action plan and implementing these ideas beyond Asia Plateau and turning them into a reality. The time in the evenings would be reserved for fun, good food and fellowship and rejuvenating old ties.



The Past coordinators pictured with their spouses, children and the volunteers.

A gathering of sorts-meeting of old friends

One by one as the guests began to descend on Asia Plateau, there was a mixture of emotions on meeting their old friends and comrades. The atmosphere was of joy, nostalgia, laughter, happiness and sadness at not seeing some old faces (as some people who were not able to come).

The inquisitive kids and spouses who came there for the first time brought in new energy. The registrations went along smoothly and after tea, the volunteers surprised the guests with the 'Hai re Mai' song and dance. This is a traditional welcome song of the Maori tribe which the coordinators themselves had been doing for years.

Every event at Asia plateau starts with the traditional and customary tour of the property. The guests left for the tour, a practice they were well acquainted with. A lot had changed over time at the property and many things still remained the same. And during this walk down memory lane, it was the old coordinators who ended up giving more information about various places of the property than the volunteers. They also shared many stories and anecdotes about their home away from home.

With a lot of enthusiasm about what awaited next, they occupied the auditorium to witness the lovely spectacle of the inauguration. Dressed in gold and green, the volunteers danced their hearts out on Gujarati garba songs. This was followed by the lighting of the lamp by Aanchal Bhartiya with a kathak dance dedicated to Lord GANESH.



The volunteers performing during the inauguration.

The ceremony was anchored by Ankita Saraf and Huzaifa Katawala. A few of the recent senior coordinators shared their experiences with the audience about how their journey with LMAD has transformed them at a personal level. One of the volunteers, Balqesa from Kenya shared her journey of continuing her life with hardships. After attending a youth conference in 2014, she is living a contented life and feels glad about being associating with this team.

To lighten the mood and entertain the audience, a skit was performed by the volunteers that depicted few funny incidents, moments and nuances of the past coordinators stay during the previous youth conferences. Bursts of laughter crackled through the air and few tears were shed as they watched themselves on stage. It was a good way to travel back in time and relive those moments again.

A special video was presented showcasing the Air India program- an extension of the four values and beliefs to a group of employees occupying various positions in the company. The main focus of this program was to bridge the growing divide between many employees and also instill in them commitment towards working for the goals for the organization. It also involved reinforcement of good values, teamwork and positive workplace spirit through a series of games and activities and open discussions among the employees.

The success of the program bore evidence to the fact that LMAD principles surpass all factors including age. Vignesh Sridhar, a young coordinator based in Canada, shared about his experience of helping organize the Air India Workshop. He added that after attending this workshop he realized that it was his long cherished dream to become a pilot and he pursued his passion and dream with determination and vigor. And today, he is a certified commercial pilot.

The inauguration ceremony was concluded by a collective singing of the national anthem.

As the guests were attending a **“conference”** after so many years, they were introduced to the Dos and Don'ts. This was also important for the spouses as they needed to be brought on the same page and integrated into the gathering.

After the introduction of the volunteers by Rajiv Agarwal and Vignesh Sridhar, the guests proceeded down to the lounge to have a fellowship with their old comrades in arms over a cup of tea.



The volunteers performing a song

THE HOLY HOUR

All the past coordinators are familiar with the concept and exercise of quiet time. For the spouses, this was something alien to most of them as they had not heard of listening to the **inner voice** and **writing** in a diary!

Even though most of the guests were born and brought up in a generation without cell phones, computers and the Internet, most of them have become slaves to the new machines and devices that eventually became their toys and an important tool that they cannot live without. And in today's world, if you ask someone to "**write** something", the other person will immediately "**type**" it into a computer or any other device. Even research has revealed that writing helps in expressing ourselves better and our true emotions and thoughts usually come when we put things on paper.

And while we still continue to listen to the news, the speeches by our politicians, the content on television, our bosses, etc.... we still don't give time to listen to our inner voice that aches to be heard. And if we listen to this inner voice, we would be guided by a divine force and learn many things about ourselves that we initially feared to learn or completely deny.

In order to bring everyone on the same page, the idea of quiet time was shared with the audience. They were given a diary and told to write what their inner voice was telling them. They dispersed, some to their favorite spots and some to every nook and cranny within reach.

Some sharing of the quiet time sessions is as follows-

"I first came in 2000. Now I am physically and mentally connected by LMAD. Discipline and consistency is important to harness the benefits of quiet time. I have observed that the four standards of LMAD have guided me throughout 15 years to make personal and social decisions."

Manek Gupta, Mumbai

"It was difficult for me to travel for a long distance but the magic of this place helped to an extent that it strengthened me to come here."

Gauri Chaudhary

"Previously I was not in the true sense of quiet time. But now I have tried to note down all my thoughts so that I can act upon them in the same way for future."

Abhishek Raina, Mumbai

In this holy hour of quiet time, many of the guests were finally able to reconnect with this exercise and surrender themselves completely over the next two and a half days.

THE AGE OLD ICE BREAKER

How is it possible for the participants of such a big gathering to easily integrate with the people whom they do not know? The solution is the age old ice breaker. A fun filled session was conducted by Rajiv Agarwal and Bhisam Mansukhani. The purpose of this session was to reconnect all the coordinators by a healthy interaction and unite them all. For this session, all the guests were divided into three groups based on experience—the first group comprised of participants from 1994 to 2001; the second from 2002 to 2008 and the last from 2009 and above. Each group nominated one person from amongst themselves to pick up a chit that contained a question or a task. She/he had to answer the question or perform the task as required. The foyer echoed with laughter and joy during the entire course of the session.



The audience in a joyful mood during the ice breaking session.

Even though the intended outcome was integration and fun, the sharing by some of the guests, resonated the impact LMAD had on their lives.

When the spouse of a coordinator (Abhishek Raina) was asked about the changes she saw in him through LMAD, she went on to say that her husband's clear heart and honesty made him very different from other people.

A couple (Namrata and Bhavya Mehta) who had met through a youth conference spoke about their connection with the teachings for a period of ten years of their relationship.

To take the guests a walk down memory lane, a trek to the plateau was organized in the evening. Filled with exuberance and determination, they reached the top of the plateau to a view that is almost impossible to disregard. And the trek was all the more memorable with the recollection of old stories and adventures of the past years. On the descent, seeing such happy faces, the valley chuckled in delight.

After more pictures and profound conversations, the auditorium was occupied again for a fun activity: postcard writing. What was unique about it was that the back of the postcard had pictures of ALL the coordinators of the past 21 years. It was specially designed for this occasion. All the guests wrote postcards to their near and dear ones, many of them writing it to their friends who couldn't make it to AP for the gathering. It was blissful. At the end of it, there were over to 250 postcards that were all ready to be posted.

After the postcard writing, the guests were made to experience the “time of silence” once again and Om Mani Padme Aum reverberated in the auditorium while the guests soaked the chant in a relaxed and meditative state.

As it was Christmas time the foyer was decorated with a Christmas tree by Harshal Thakare and Susheel. And later in the evening, Santa Claus (none other than our Vineet Tanna) came bearing presents for the children. With Christmas carols being sung and few dance performances by the children, the evening bore a very festive mood and it was followed by all the coordinators making the foyer a dance floor. The huge grins and beaming faces were a true indication of the night being a hit. The energy travelled to the lounges where engrossing conversations took place over hot chocolate.

DEEP THINKING, DISCUSSION & DESIGN

Initially starting off as a ten day residential conference, the duration of the National Youth Conference is seven days now and similarly a lot has changed over the years with respect to the way in which the conference is conducted. A new activity is introduced or refined to suit each conference. Today, many members of the team feel that the future conferences should be improved and should be taken to another stature in terms of participants to the activities. In order to facilitate a collection of ideas and an action plan, a **Design Thinking** workshop was conducted for over a period of two days for two hours each.

And the main objective of this workshop was to identify the basic **features, needs, obstacles and insights which would lead to an ultimate game changer that would result in a future project.**

For this the entire gathering was bifurcated into five groups. Two of the groups discussed about the **National Youth Conferences**, another two discussed about the **outreach programs** and the last group discussed about the **corporate programs**.



The audience during the design thinking workshop

The teams were given ready-made charts and sticky notes to go about their work. After the group discussion, each group came up with the following game changers -

GAME CHANGER	NAMES
Creating Second Line of Leadership with the same commitment	Sudarshan Suresh, Aswini Subramanian, Vignesh Sridhar, Harshwardhan Mishra, Rohit Nayar, Rajiv Agarwal, Rohit Lavhe, Juhee Tiwari, Karan Kale
Creation of the LMAD App	Saurab Gadiya, Abhishek Raina, Alisha Navlani, Sudarshan Suresh
Creating a space within the LMAD Conference for past participants who are now working to share their stories with new participants.	Bhisham Mansukhani, Anuradha Jejani, Vighnesh Viswanathan, Abha Doshi, Hunaid Wajihi, Vaibhav Shaha

Creating focused leadership workshops for LMAD participants who have the potential and commitment to contribute to the future of LMAD	
Training of trainers, facilitators and organizers, + Creating local leadership by using social media and technology	Rajiv Agarwal, Anurag Maloo, Koushik Modi, Rimjhim Tandon,
Creation of a centralized communication system and concept of value addition program.	Kunal Malik, Rachit Khatri, Sanket Shah, Mudit Surana, Aishwarya Deshpande

In order for the people to decide which game changer they would work on, the World Café Concept was applied. Accordingly, each game changer was assigned a table number in the dining hall, and people could choose which table they wish to sit and which team they plan to work with. And there was enthusiasm from everyone and many took up the challenge and commitment to work.



The teams above and below are seen in a huddle discussing a game changer in the dining hall

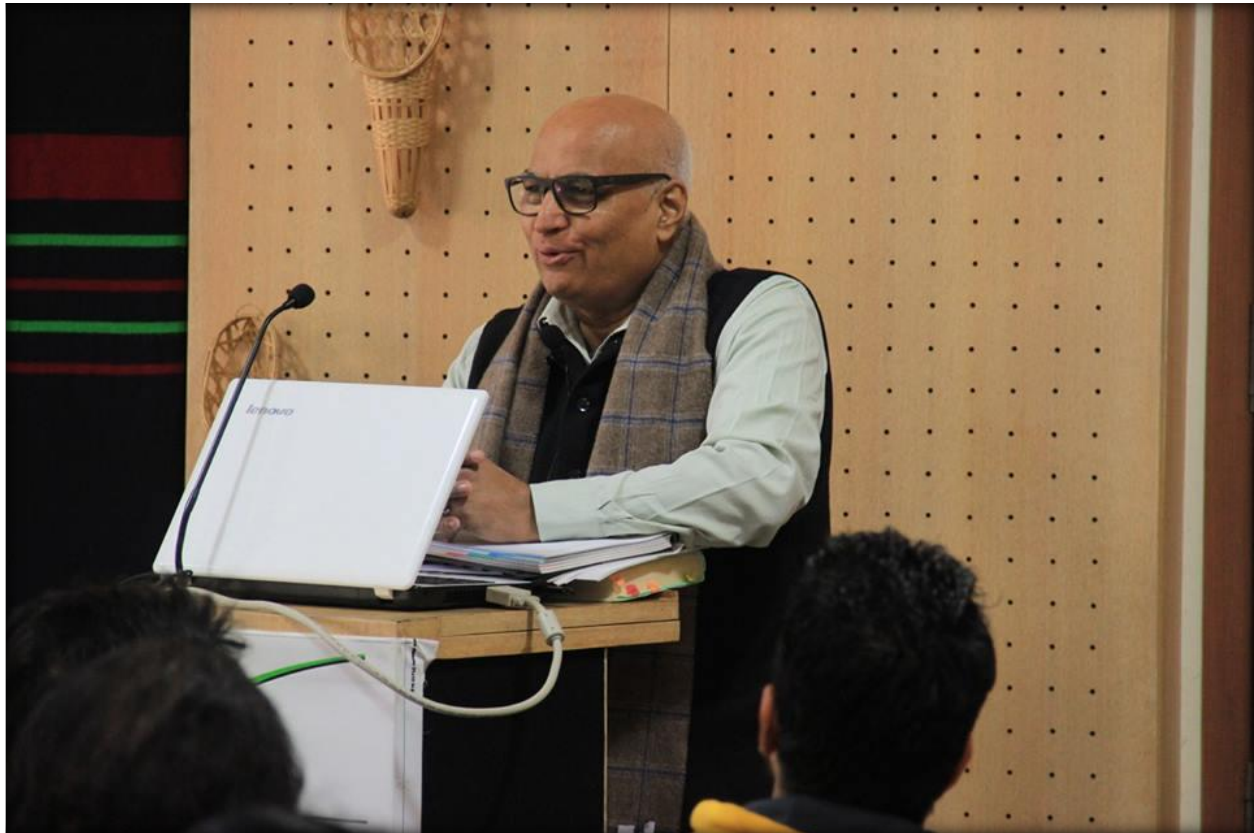


A separate report has been prepared for the Design Thinking Workshop and detailed information regarding the workshop can be found there.

A DEEP INSIGHT INTO PEACE **BETWEEN TWO NEIGHBOURS**

To take the conference forward, the event was graced by the arrival of Mr. Sudheendra Kulkarni. Mr Sudheendra Kulkarni is a former member of the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) where he was a strategist for Shri L. K. Advani and a speech writer for Honorable former Prime Minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Mr Kulkarni also served as a director of the Prime Minister’s Office under him.

Currently, he is the chairman of the Observer Research Foundation, a think tank based in Mumbai that is currently working on the Swachh Bharat campaign and towards building peace between India and Pakistan. He has recently written “How to achieve Aman and Amity in Indo-Pak relations- Ideas and action for better India.” And what better topic to discuss than the issue of peace between two Asian neighbors? This topic is very sensitive for every citizen of this country and with many mixed point of views from the media and the people, it is therefore paramount to go back to history and study the ground reality of what went wrong and what needs to be done.



Mr Sudheendra Kulkarni addressing the audience

After thanking the team for inviting him and by quoting Pope Francis “What the world is suffering from is the malice of globalization of indifference.” he began his address. He shared the latest news about the India PM meeting the Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif on his birthday (December 25th) and added that such acts of a human touch can change history. Incidentally, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee also shares the same birthday. He also manifested to the youth that reconciliation of Indo-Pak relations can be achieved through rediscovery of history. Also, he shared his reflection and thoughts of how to overcome the partition between India and Pakistan through a video “Kuch Naya Karein” provoking each individual to bridge the gap between India and Pakistan.

He enlightened the whole gathering about the relations of great men of history like Mohammad. Ali Jinnah and Mahatma Gandhi.

The audience listened with rapt attention and when the time came for questions and answers, many hands shot up and he answered all questions patiently and he revealed a lot of knowledge from his studies and work in this subject.

As a conclusion, he wanted to leave the entire audience with the thought of inculcating history to gain knowledge about India and Pakistan’s partition and work towards reconciliation and respect the symbols of patriotism. He wanted each Indian to have this thought of Pakistan being prospering at the same level as India does. He also gave a

thought over Hindu-Muslim harmonization and asked the Indian Prime Minister to ensure that India must be free from communal rights and must totally concern with the safety and security of each individual.

His talk ended with a thunderous applause and a standing ovation from the audience.

Towards the evening a session was conducted by Mr. Kiran Gandhi and Mr. Saurabh Gupta. They spoke about the various programs that Asia Plateau hosts other than the Let's Make a Difference conference and how anyone who connected with the idea could participate. This was further elaborated by the people responsible for the conception of Grampari.

The evening of December 26th was the last evening that we would spend together. To make it memorable, a formal dinner setting was arranged for the guests. With the dining area lit by candles and a hand-picked menu with the food being served by the volunteers, the dinner went very well. After dessert, an extraordinary surprise was waiting for all the guests. Aneesh Vidyashankar, a 24 year old violinist from Bangalore who has performed across 23 countries for the last 18 years enthralled the audience with his stick. Also known as the 'wireless walking violinist', Aneesh embarked on a different tune by fusing Karnatic and Indian classical music with Western music. He was also complemented by Kishore Karkala, who gave strength to the music with the keyboard.



Aneesh Vidyashankar and Kishore Karkala enthraling the audience

That evening they put the audience in a spell and made them sit on the edges of their seats. Such was the power of the music that some people from the crowd couldn't keep from shedding a tear or two listening to his soulful melodies. The music struck a chord with everyone and they were taken to another world and the atmosphere was electric and charged with energy of positivity and goodness. The last night together at Asia Plateau was in fact, the most beautiful one.

The Multi faith is an important ceremony on the last day of any program at Asia Plateau. For thirty minutes, all of us sang prayers from various faiths, chanted OM and prayed from the bottom of our hearts for the well-being of the world. Quiet time that day was exceptional, the dawn of the morning brought a new dawn in our hearts as well. Our time together was coming to an end but our spirits were rekindled with elation and resolve.

The very last session of the program was conducted by Bhisham Mansukhani. A recapitulation of the 'Power of One' exercise was carried out, which inspired each individual to bring change in society and provoke them to dream beyond the conventions. They introspected for some time on the parameters of their **gifts**, the **needs of this world** and **what the world will pay them for**. It was a self-realization activity which made them act upon their future goals and plans.

The ideas and points that slowly began to come got everyone to focus on their life purpose and how they can use it to make a difference to themselves and the society at large. And everyone was seen writing rigorously and passionately.

“The meaning of life is to find your gift and the purpose of life is to give it away.”

The Volunteers of the Conference worked tirelessly throughout the day to make all the guests feel very comfortable. They would constantly be on their toes at the crack of dawn and would rest once the guests retired to bed at night. Such was their hard work that they did **all the wash-ups** (breakfast-lunch and dinner) from the start of the conference till the end. And as a way of saying thank you, a special table was laid out for them in the dining hall and they were served a delicious lunch by some of the guests and other senior coordinators. They were showered with appreciation and admiration for their care and love they extended towards the guests during the whole conference.

Apart from the volunteers, many other people also worked from behind the scenes to make this gathering a reality. This thought was conceived in December 2014, and the work started from January 2015. Ankita Saraf was instrumental in working closely from the start to the finish. Whether it was inviting people, arranging for the conference materials, planning the schedule and sessions, and handling other aspects of the gathering, Ankita was always there and she worked full time for this from her home in

Allahabad. Few coordinators who also proved to be a strong support even though their presence was missed in the gathering were Dipti Rane from Mumbai and Navendu Shirali from Chicago, USA. Both of them brought a lot of value on the table through their suggestions and ideas via e-mail and conference calls. It was Navendu who suggested the idea of having a design thinking workshop.

And few senior coordinators who came a few days early and also worked before the start of the conference were Rachana Mahajan, Harshal Thakare, Rachit Khatri, Vineet Tanna, Koushik Modi, Vignesh Sridhar, Sudarshan Suresh and Vighnesh Viswanathan. These people also lifted the conference with their hard work and presence. Last but not the least, a special mention to our other seniors –Aswini Subramanian, Shraddha and Rajiv Agarwal and Bhasham Mansukhani.

With lunch, the gathering came to an end. And the guests left, vowing to come back, give back and continue to **make a difference**.