

## DECEMBER WORKSHOP 2018

26 December 2018 – 01 January 2019  
Asia Plateau

### Part 1

Let's Make A Difference (LMAD) has been running the December Workshop successfully for a very long time. In this workshop people learn to go deep within themselves and listen to their own conscious by practicing 'Quiet Time'. Practicing quiet time helps in making the right decisions in life as the answer comes right from the soul. The workshop helps one to cleanse her/his soul and look at life in a different light.

The reason it is called a workshop and not a conference is because here the participants are less in number and the sharing and discussions are limited within this group. There were 12 participants in this year's workshop who came down to Asia Plateau from different regions of India to mark their presence. The cities covered were Pune, Thane, Mumbai, Nagpur, Kolkata, Indore, Jamshedpur, Ahmednagar, Ankleshwar and Katni. It was a diverse participation of young women and men all under one roof.

The workshop started from 26th December and every-one reached Asia Plateau before dinner time. We had a short introduction of ourselves before we went on to have dinner. Post dinner all the participants sat with the convener of the workshop. He explained about the purpose of the December workshop, and how it was going to bring about a change in one's life beyond Asia Plateau. While the discussion was going on the participants were made aware of the decorum which one was expected to maintain -

- The December Workshop is an intense one and even the slightest distraction has the power to disturb anyone's zone of silence. All participants were requested to have a sense of thoughtfulness towards their co-participants.
- Phones were prohibited during sessions and while discussions were going on. However, the participants were allowed to keep their phones with them, it was expected of them to have self-control.
- Not to have any personal agenda during the course of the workshop.
- Not to forget the objective of their presence.
- To openly express their thoughts and queries and not to keep it to themselves.

Each of the participants was allotted with a room of her/his own. However, participants were discouraged to visit one another's room after going back to the hostel at night. This was because it could have distracted and deviated the participants from the purpose of being in the workshop.

The workshop was intense with long hours of silence giving the participants enough space and time to dive deep and introspect. The workshop was designed in a unique way. Most of the quiet time sessions were question based and the questions very easily transitioned from one to another. It had an uninterrupted flow to it. Each question was inter-linked and thoughts flowed through these questions very easily. It was made sure that by the end of the workshop one could connect all the dots and the result too would be prominent.

## **Part 2**

### **Reason to come back for the December Workshop**

It was the first time that all the participants sat across the table for a discussion. And the question asked by the convener to all the participants was - 'Why did you come for the workshop?' There were 12 odd people inside the room and it was obvious that there would be some reason for which all had gathered under the same roof.



Each person had a different reason, a different purpose to be there. Some were there in search of answers to any of their problems as an individual. Some wanted to interact with their inner self and introspect, some thought it was a rare chance to spend the winter amidst the nature admiring the lush green scenery, while some thought it would bring about a pleasant change in their individual mundane line. Different people, different mindset, different reasons but one subject in common - 'I'. All of them sitting across the table that morning talked about their issues in life and how they wanted to get benefited as individuals. But not even one participant had a plural approach. They did not think about the society or nation as a whole; but only saw themselves under the limelight.

After every participant finished explaining her/his reason of being at AP, the convener explained that how important it was for them to think collectively. He started off by saying that a plural environment is a healthy environment and that a plural world is far better than a singular world. According to the convener the approach should always be “WE” and not “I” and the motive should not be to just be about solving the problems in life but to bring permanent conclusions to them. He further elaborated on how one can transform from “I” to “WE”. He said that one must always try to satisfy herself/himself at the earliest and only then can he save the rest of the world. The introduction of this concept was an eyeopener for all the participants and they all got a new perspective of life. The journey of realization had just begun, this was just the tip of the iceberg.

## Habits

Habits and manners make a human being. In order to build a good personality, one must always check on his or her habits. All human beings have habits - good or bad, but not very often does anyone sit down to think about them. Nor do they spend time in classifying their habits. The participants were asked to utilize one of their quiet time sessions to think about the habits that they registered within themselves and to classify them to find out which habit of theirs did they want to throw out of their system and which habits they wanted to retain.

Very soon the participants were out in the sun to ponder upon their habits; and after a deep quiet time session, all sat across the table and discussed their habits. The classification of habits was done mainly on four basis- **good habits, bad habits, habits that one wants to change and habits that one wants to inculcate**. While this topic was being discussed subjects like being judgmental, being introvert, indulging in bad practices like smoking, drinking and gambling came up. These were all serious issues and some participants decided to work hard on these aspects and overcome these habits.

It was during this discussion that many of the participants realized that that they were not conscious of their habits. Habits are not always physically, sometimes habits can be psychological and even subconscious. A person may have a habit of reacting to certain situations subconsciously and this might affect their personalities in future. Thus, they promised themselves to keep checking their reactions to such situations and respond more cautiously.

## Depression

Depression is a feeling of unhappiness or sorrow. It is a state of mind when a person feels lost, sad, confused, agitated, hopeless, and all kind of negative feelings. It makes one pessimistic and creates lot of mental stress. Many people consider depression to be a mental disorder, but the fact is in today's world with so much stress and work pressure all around almost every individual has to go through the phase of depression. Yes, you read it right, depression is just a phase and it is momentary in nature. It comes in everyone's life and one must always think positive and take every mis-happening in a positive stride. One will feel light and happy if he takes all negativity with a pinch of salt and try converting all discouragement into encouragement and inspiration.

While discussing about depression during the workshop a very famous quote came up that said - "THIS TOO SHALL PASS". This line meant that no matter how difficult a time is it will come to an end and good days will arrive so one must not be depressed instead feel optimistic and constantly work hard to overpower the bad times. Similarly, it also means that if someone is at the peak of his game he must not be carried away by the success as that too shall pass if constant effort is not put to maintain the position. It is a line that stayed with all the participants even after the workshop was over.

As the participants were talking about depression the convener gave a really effective piece of advice to overcome depression. He said one must always try recollecting one's days of success or the most anticipated moments of his life. Recollecting the highlights of life helps one to forget all worries and one feels charged and energized to overcome any difficulties ahead.

## Success Stories

Depression was a topic that everyone inside the room could relate to as everyone went through this phase some time in their life. And the easiest way to fight depression is by recollecting the moments of success in life. Successful moment does not only mean a moment when someone achieved something great in life but also those small moments of joy that satisfies one's soul.

Failures are the pillars of success. This is true and everyone at some point in life experiences failure but there is nothing to be disheartened. One must always keep looking back at the journey they had so far and what all one has achieved in that journey of life, big or small. This gives them the strength to move ahead in life and unlock doors of greater achievements. Pondering upon the success one has had makes him strong emotionally and increases the mental ability to tolerate all hardships in life.

Everyone is struggling in some way or the other. Just like the nature of people the struggle also differs from person to person and if the struggles meet with achievement the satisfaction one gets is unexplainable. It is a moment of pride and all human beings want to share their moments of joy, pride and happiness with others. When the participants were asked to share their success stories with others there was no holding back. The success stories not only promoted a positive vibe across the table but also all the participants got a chance to know each other a bit more in depth. It portrayed the participants in a strong light. This topic also broke the ice to some extent and made the participants open up.

## **I don't have time**

A lame excuse one gives for not being able to do something productive is " I DON'T HAVE TIME ". This lame excuse is stopping people from achieving what they want to achieve. It is true that if we utilize every second of our lives in something productive rather than indulging into something useless, there is nothing one cannot achieve. It is very important to have control over time and everything will fall into place.

One evening post dinner the convener decided to explain to the participants about how they could utilize their time more smartly and put an end to the universal excuse "I DON'T HAVE TIME". To explain it better the convener went ahead with one of the participant's daily routine. On analysing the timetable, it was found that he had only worked for 48 hours of daylight time in the whole week and the other 120 hours were wasted. This was 120 hours of day light time which equals to 5 days was wasted binge watching TV shows, talking to friends over phone, scrolling through social media and sleeping. Another shocking revelation was that if calculated the number of hours we have slept since birth will be around 50% of our lives. Which means half our life was wasted sleeping. Those 5 days that got wasted was his daylight time that he could have turned into something productive.

After the analysis everyone inside the room seemed to be highly amused and at the same time terrified to confront the truth of how much time each one wastes. So much could have been done in that time. After this everyone decided to analyse their own daily roaster and try managing time for the progressive things they want to do.

## **Part 3**

Initially quiet time was not question based and the participants were asked to nurture any thought that crossed their mind during their time in silence because of which the thoughts of all individuals were scattered. So, to bring all participants on the same page questions were introduced to think about during the quiet time. The duration of quiet time became longer and more intense with every single day. This was necessary because these questions required more focus and introspection.

## **What am I searching for in life?**

It is important to be very clear about what one is searching for in life. It sets the course of the journey of life and which way one wants to direct it. After all everyone has a quest in life and a purpose to fulfil. The best way to find an answer to this question was during the quiet time, when one is all by herself/himself amidst the lush green scenery of AP and silence all around.

A boy said that his quest in life was REALITY and that he thought anything and everything around him could be fake and he might not even know. One said HAPPINESS is something she has been searching for in life for quite some time. Peace, purpose, love and passion were some of the other things that the participants searched for in life.

This was the first year in the history of LMAD that the age difference among the participants was too little (maximum 26 years and minimum 17 years) and their thoughts complemented one another. Everyone could relate to one another and drew points to reflect upon from each other's thoughts.

During the discussion everyone brought something to the table and for the first time all the thoughts seemed to be on the same page. The thoughts were pure and profound.

## **Who am I?**

At a glance the question seemed simple and they thought they knew the answer. But somethings are not that easy as it seems to be. While reflecting upon this question for the first time everyone went blank. The participants were lost as in which perspective should they approach the question. To be honest in the busy scheduled life people hardly have time to ask this question to oneself.

At first the participants had an easy approach to the question. The answers were simple and floated over the surface. But a longer and more intense quiet time allowed by the convener helped them to dive deep.

After reflecting upon this question during several quiet time sessions and over a few cups of coffee, the participants got answers on their plates that was unknown even to themselves. As if this question had held a mirror in front of them and it reflected their inner-selves. It showed them the darkest corners of their life, something that they would never have wanted to visit. This was very important.

This question made many participants confess many incidents that they were trying to overlook. Instead, they now wanted to rectify themselves. Some participants also had answers that made them feel proud about their personalities. It made them count on the good deeds that they had done or at least made an attempt to do so. This showed that the question compelled the participants to be true to themselves and face their darkest deeds.

The discussion for this question was more intense. The topic was more sensitive, and the convener dealt with the topics very delicately. Each participant spoke for a longer duration trying to pour out all that she/he wanted to confess. The convener purposely stretched the discussion time as each participant should have had the time to imbibe what they just reflected upon.

## **Who do I want to be?**

Everyone has their ambition in life and this question provoked them to think about their ambition and passion.

As the convener, had explained the approach to this question should not have been like a plan book where one is planning his years ahead, but it should be a thoughtful approach as in what does one want to do for the society? And what was it the society will pay him for?

After a constructive quiet time, all participants gathered in the Australia room for the discussion. Everyone seemed excited to share their thoughts. Glancing at each other the participants could see the sign of passion and excitement in their eyes. The positivity inside the room could be felt. The discussion started on a healthy note and everyone contributed their share to the conversation. They talked about their passion in life like dance, music, art and how they want to take their talent forward.

Many talked about how they want to go ahead with social work and set an example for others whereas some of them wanted to be the string of their family and bind everyone together. Some also talked about how they were going to pursue their academic career and settle abroad.

After hearing everyone, the convener felt that more time in silence was required to reflect on such a crucial question and that too much time was devoted on in-house discussions which needed to be reduced and more time was to be spent outside amidst nature.

## How can I be what I want to be?

Some things in life are easier said than done. The previous questions (“what I am searching for in life?”; “Who am I?”; “What do I want to be?”) are questions that depend on realization and thoughtful approach. But this question here needed a practical approach.

Everyone had their road-maps made and it was discovered that many of their thoughts matched with each other. Ironically it being a practical question had generated deep realizations. While reflecting upon this question the participants realized that:

- there may be a thousand issues one wants to solve but it is necessary to take one step at a time, slow and steady.
- Orders should not be taken from mind but given to it.
- Time is precious and should not be wasted in unproductive and unhealthy practices. Utilize the time in hand to the fullest and with full focus and concentration.
- Money is the byproduct of one's hard work, so the focus should be on the hard work put in and not the money earned.

## Part 4

The questions discussed before are an integral part of the December Workshop but apart from that the workshop is also special for the following reasons: 31 December!

The workshop is set towards the end of December and it is quite obvious that the participants were going to bid goodbye to this year and welcome a new beginning together. LMAD of course celebrates it differently.

The day before 31<sup>st</sup> of December, the participants were given two sheets and were asked to write down all the negative memories and bad incidents that they had experienced in that year in one and on the other sheet they were asked to write down their own prayers for the new year.

On 31st of December post tea time the convener along with all the participants trekked up to the hills behind the campus to experience the last setting sun of the year. On reaching the top of the heights the participants along with the convener held their hands and observed the sun set behind the highlands in silence. The participants burnt the sheet that contained all the negativity and prayed that with a new sunrise their life would start afresh the next day.

After the negative burning the convener guided everyone down, back to Asia Plateau. And post dinner everyone sat near a campfire in the backyard of the campus. Returning from the bonfire after a few minutes everyone gathered in the lounge for a time of silence. There were around 25 people in the room (including the YC volunteers) and each one lit one candle to mark the completion of 25 years of LMAD in 2019. After that everyone sat down to meditate and be still. The magic of stillness was practiced.

When the clock struck twelve there were celebrations heard outside, but the participants decided to sit in silence for a few more minutes, just to freeze that moment of a new beginning. After that the convener cut the cake and everyone in the room was offered a slice. Having had the cake everyone went back to their rooms in silence.





## 1st January, 2019

On the morning of 1st January everyone was up at the usual time. Through the course of the workshop everyone had finally learnt to wake up without the snooze button. The morning felt fresh and positive. The participants sat in the open space for their morning quiet time and experienced the rise of the first sun that marked a new beginning. The warmth of the sun felt enchanting and the view was mesmerizing.

The sun rays brought with it joy, hope, positivity and enthusiasm. After the quiet time when all gathered inside the room for sharing their thoughts everyone felt cleansed and all the faces were glowing.

After a short sharing of thoughts, the convener had a few lines for each of the participants to speak. He gave the participants some fruitful advices so that they excelled in life. And finally, after thanking the participants for joining in the workshop and wishing them good luck and prosperity he brought the workshop to an end.

## Quiet Time

The concept of quiet time was first introduced to all the participants during the Youth Conference. It is time one spends with his inner conscience. After this concept was explained to the participants during the YC they felt the need to practice this exercise. Having practiced quiet time for the initial few days the participants seemed satisfied with the results and were also happy that they could spend some time with themselves amidst nature. It is a rare experience in the cities.

Once the participants were all set for the December Workshop, they went in knowing that it is going to be intense and that majority of the workshop would be devoted to quiet time. During their quiet time in the workshop the participants were given pillows and mats and were asked to find any suitable corner within the campus for their silent time with themselves. The participants had to make sure that the corner they chose was calm and silent with the least number of footfalls and distractions. This would help them to concentrate more into deep thinking and introspection.

Initially when the quiet time was not question based, it was noticed that the participants were not at all on the same page. Although it was not a bad thing because thoughts differ from people to people but to have a proper discussion, it was important that all the thoughts were channelized in the same direction. The question based quiet time was started.

There were times during the quiet time sessions when the participants felt lost and dejected. They could not dig deep into themselves to find answers or if they had thoughts coming those were not well filtered. The convener explained that it was absolutely okay to not be able to ponder upon one question as sometimes it is difficult to control thoughts. He also said that one must consider a thought pure if it qualifies all the four standards that is PHUL (Purity, Honesty, Unselfishness and (unconditional) Love). Only if the thoughts are pure one can say it is from the soul and not just from the mind.

It is ironical that the quiet time which was supposed to be a time of silence was actually the loudest time at Asia Plateau. Loud not outside but inside, loud not in terms of words uttered but in terms of thoughts that struck.

## A session with Rajmohan Gandhi

Rajmohan Gandhi is a biographer and a research professor at the Centre for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, USA. He is the grandson of the Father of the Nation - Mahatma Gandhi. His father - Devdas Gandhi was the fourth and the youngest son of Mahatma Gandhi.

It so happened that while the December Workshop was going on Rajmohan Gandhi was also there at Asia Plateau. Everyone was eager to talk to him. The convener also felt that it would be great if Sir could speak to the participants and share some knowledge with them. He requested Sir to join the table of discussion one morning to which he generously agreed.

In the time he spent with the participants he talked about his new book "MODERN SOUTH INDIA". He also explained how he started his writing career and how his interest towards the unexplored South led him to write this book. He also talked about his previous books and the history of Punjab. In the later part of the conversation he answered many questions asked by the participants regarding his political views and his personal life. It was a humble meet and all the participants felt highly obliged to spend a morning hour with the legendary personality. He concluded by saying that we must learn more about China and also move to the villages and stay there to connect with the rural people and learn more about their way of life.

