



**Towards  
a humane world**  
Marking  
**50 years of Asia Plateau**  
Celebrating differences, melting divisions

# Editorial

## Fifty years of Asia Plateau



**THESE 50 YEARS** have been a fantastic journey. Hundreds of thousands of people from India and all over the world have come to Asia Plateau, the Initiatives of Change (IoC) centre in the quiet hill town of Panchgani, and learnt the secret of the inner voice.

They have included senior civil servants, business executives, local government officers, factory workers, villagers, youth, students and teachers. They have taken away with them the discovery that in silence and stillness they can find the inspiration to deal with tough situations. Some of their stories are told in this report.

Our 50th anniversary conference, from 17-21 January, took the theme of 'celebrating differences, melting divisions'. Since its earliest days, Asia Plateau has endeavoured to inspire the inner change that melts divisions while respecting differences. Our experience suggests that reconciliation and healing become possible when people allow themselves to be touched by the spirit of honesty, forgiveness, compassion and conscience. They also find the strength to confront corruption, dishonesty and injustice.

In the years to come, we pray that Asia Plateau will continue to shine a bright light for a compassionate India and to inspire people to build a world which is truly humane.

Ravindra Rao, Director, Asia Plateau

### 'A fantastic journey'

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# Celebrating an expanded mission



**THREE HUNDRED PEOPLE** from 41 countries gathered at Asia Plateau on 17 January 2018 for the 50th anniversary of the Initiatives of Change centre. They included some who had been present at the opening in 1968, and many citizens of Panchgani, the hill town where Asia Plateau is situated.

In 1968, the site was barren, with only one tree. Today it is covered with forest and gardens, full of bird song. Ravindra Rao, Director of Asia Plateau, recalled that most of those who attended the opening had come from cities and towns visited by Rajmohan Gandhi's March on Wheels in 1963.

By contrast, 400 villagers from the local area had kicked off the centre's 50th year in February 2017. Their presence was a testament to the expansion of Asia Plateau's mission to embrace the 'real India' of the villages.

Among the earliest international figures to visit Asia Plateau was U Nu, the first Prime Minister of independent Burma, with his family. His daughter Than Than Nu returned for the anniversary conference. So did Barbara Thummalapally, daughter of Stanley DD Nichols-Roy, one of the founding fathers of the Northeast Indian state of Meghalaya, who had attended the opening of Asia Plateau.



India's Department of Post commemorated the anniversary with the publication of a Special Cover envelope, on sale in post offices. Launching the envelope, Ganesh Sawaleshwarkar, the

Regional Postmaster-General, said, 'The Department of Post is a messenger like you. A postage stamp is a thumbnail of information, a small window through which you can initiate new learning in the minds of those who receive it. Your courses aim at a change of attitude and that change requires moral values and ethical thinking.'





## Goal for the next 50 years

Rajmohan Gandhi  
a founder of Asia Plateau

In many parts of the world, including India, the belief that the majority should be allowed to dominate seems to be growing. It is essential that we fight for the rights of the vulnerable.

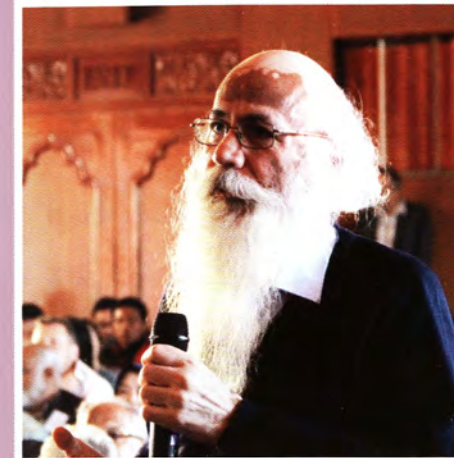
Creating a humane society could be Asia Plateau's goal for the next 50 years. Those who may help us most in doing this are the people who come from the villages around to work in the buildings and grounds, and at Grampari, our rural development centre. Our relationship with them is the strongest message which goes out from Asia Plateau to the community around us, and it could be a model for our country.

God Almighty could use this place to create a completely equal, loving society.

.....  
'Know your neighbour's story.'  
.....

**WE HAVE JUST** been celebrating 70 years of Indian independence. We may be a free nation, but, as individuals, how we oppress one another! We are still a high/low society.

In all our countries, we have strong opinions about other groups, but we don't have knowledge about them. One of our biggest needs in India today is to 'know your neighbour's story'. When you listen to the story of the neighbouring group you may find that your group is not so different from theirs.



## Towards a humane world

Neerja Chowdhury  
Journalist and political commentator

**THE MOMENT YOU** enter Asia Plateau, it says something to you: the beauty of its surroundings, the agelessness of the hills around, the Krishna Valley, the vibrant coloured flowers, the shining floors. It's as if they speak to you beyond human agency. I have sometimes come here to recharge myself.

Fifty years ago, today, Asia Plateau was inaugurated. I think of all that was put into these buildings by so many people, from India and around the world, which has created the marvel and magic of Asia Plateau. Institutions are not so easy to create but then nation building is all about institution building.

We have been trying to look ahead at the next 50 years, which is not easy to do. Above all, we will be facing challenges of survival. A former President of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, made a presentation in 2002 pointing to the water challenges we

could be facing in 2070. If we don't conserve and recharge our water bodies, a 30-year-old will look like they are 80. We will only get half a glass of water a day. He painted a frightening picture: water wars, contamination of water, waterborne diseases. Even today, thousands of people in Delhi suffer from vector-borne diseases each year.

We all know about the poor quality of air we breathe in many parts of India. Hundreds of thousands of children in Delhi suffer from asthma. Diplomats don't want to be assigned to India's capital, because of the air pollution.

In Punjab, a prosperous state, the soil has been made toxic by pesticides. There's a train every day that is called the cancer express. It carries people to Rajasthan where treatment is cheaper.

As well as the environmental challenges, which include climate



change, there are the challenges of technology, which is a double-edged sword. Artificial intelligence is changing the labour scene. People will be thrown out of their jobs: this will be a huge issue in India, where 65 per cent of our population is under 35. Unless addressed, our demographic dividend could turn into a demographic nightmare.

This brings me to child malnutrition, which is emerging as one of the most important issues today. For all the improvements we have made, two fifths of our children under five are still stunted by malnutrition. And if you have lost the battle in the first two years of life, what future India?

Politically, the world lives on the brink. Politics is going to be much more contentious and polarized in the coming years worldwide. What role is India is going to play?

As I see it, India may face three major challenges in the years ahead. One will be how India remains as one entity. There are the gaps between those who have and those who don't. There are the needs of minorities, the Dalits and the tribals. There are regional disparities, knowledge gaps, social gulfs; the issues on India's peripheries; Kashmir.

Then there are the challenges to our democratic polity: today all our institutions are being eroded. And thirdly, even after seven decades of Independence, the challenge to meet the basic needs of all our people, and do it with dignity and equity.

In this light, what role can Asia Plateau play?

Overall, we have to create the basis of a humane society.

Asia Plateau could also support and enable the creation of alternatives. Its

architect, Gordon Brown, thought of saving rainwater 50 years ago. Asia Plateau pioneered organic farming and solar energy. That is what we need to do today; help to create an alternative way of living.

And, Asia Plateau could also help fashion a new leadership. How do you motivate people in politics, the media, medicine, in all fields, to take on challenges, to look beyond self?

One of Asia Plateau's unique selling points is its emphasis on an inner anchoring: on invoking those universal energies to guide.

Another is teamwork. To work in a group, which we Indians are not so good at. The friends I made here 50 years ago are still my best friends. Why? There was no quid pro quo in our relationships. At the heart of any real teamwork, relationship or partnership has to be the experience of forgiveness. There is no other experience as spiritual as forgiveness: forgiving others, forgiving yourself.

A third is reaching out to India's diverse groups. Only at Asia Plateau could you see, as we did last night,

a group from Nagaland singing Mahatma Gandhi's favourite bhajan, *Vaishnav jan*, for those from the rest of India and the world.

Somebody asked me what has stayed with me of what I learnt at Asia Plateau years ago. I believe in an inner mentor. For me it has been an experience to catch those 'silver fish', the thoughts that come in solitude and silence. It's helped me with my work, and given me insights.

Asia Plateau exposed me to the world. We live in such small worlds; but there's a wide world out there, which puts your own life into perspective.

My experiences here also gave me the confidence not to be awed by anybody. And to never say die, however bad things may be.

.....  
'At the heart of any real teamwork has to be the experience of forgiveness.'  
.....

# Celebrating differences, melting divisions



Pastor James Wuye and Imam Mohammed Ashafa came from Nigeria to speak on the theme of 'celebrating differences, melting divisions' at Asia Plateau's 50th anniversary. They once fought in opposing militias in inter-religious violence, but today they are joint directors of the Inter-faith Mediation Centre in Kaduna, Nigeria. The story of their reconciliation and peace-making work is told in the FLT Films documentary *The Imam and Pastor*, which was screened the night before they spoke.

**I WAS PROGRAMMED** subtly by those who use our values as an instrument of division. My passion led me to do negative things, creating a narrative in the hearts of others that still lingers. My pain is that I cannot win everybody to think positively.

Sometimes ethnic, racial or religious divisions cannot melt completely. Memories are passed down. People who are not part of the problem are co-opted into the problem. They can be destroyed by it. We transfer this baggage to young people.

These things take time to end. Resilience is the watchword. Keep at it. Melt those differences, but keep the pot so you can use it again. The pot is the individual, the identity we carry, so that we can inch towards each other

with sincere hearts and sincere minds.

This morning we met with some young people from Afghanistan. We want to encourage them. Though they start alone, they can create a path, a life and a light which will outlive them. They can go beyond tolerance and accept their differences.

We don't say 'tolerate' because tolerance connotes negativity. We say 'accept', because in accepting our differences we can live and act inclusively.



Pastor James Wuye

.....  
 'We don't say tolerate.  
 We say accept.'  
 .....

**HOW DEEP WITHIN** me do I accept others? Do they need to look like me, speak like me, walk like me, think like me and believe what I believe for there to be acceptance?

Pastor James is totally different from me. We don't think alike, because we don't believe in the same thing. He is a passionate evangelical Christian. I am a passionate Islamist. I will never compromise an inch of what I sincerely believe to be true, of my culture, my tradition.

The mission of Initiatives of Change is building trust across the world's divides. As different as I am from the pastor, we create a safe space where

we dare not consciously harm each other.

This path does not give you popularity. If you want to become an idol, highlighting hate and promoting divisions may seem an easier fast track. In every nation state, including India and Nigeria, we can see that those who flourish, who have access to political and economic power, are those who highlight our differences.

You may be lonely today but you are the icon that the world is searching for. You are part of the few who can bring about change: the popular majority has never brought about a sincere change.



Imam Mohammed Ashafa

.....  
 'Do others need to  
 look, speak, walk,  
 think, believe like  
 me for there to be  
 acceptance?'  
 .....



When the session was opened to questions a Muslim woman from Bombay spoke of her fear of asking the Imam at her mosque to talk about harmony and peace. Another participant asked, 'Does it stop at acceptance or is transformation a part of this journey as well?' A third asked Imam Ashafa how he had found the courage to take the first step towards reconciliation with Pastor James, by visiting his mother in hospital.

## Imam Ashafa

One of the things that keeps me going is self-discovery. Am I truly a Muslim? Or am I pretending? Many of us are accidental Muslims. We are Muslims by birth. We do not understand what really makes a person a Muslim.

The Prophet repeated three times, 'I swear by him in whose hand lies my soul that he is not a believer.' When his companions asked him who he was talking about, he replied, 'It is he (or she) whose neighbour is not safe from the evil of his mouth and the evil of his hand.'

God appreciates what you do for the other more deeply than what you do for him. God doesn't appreciate the

hours you spend in the temple or the mosque as much as how you put a smile on the face of the other person. Pastor James is my neighbour. When his mother was sick, I conquered my fear and said 'Let me go and show him my humanity'. I went to the hospital.

You ask, 'How do I speak to an Imam? How do I, who have no authority, speak about peace?' A hadith of the Prophet of Islam says, 'Deliver my message even if it is only one verse you know.' He told his followers that they would never have faith until they had love. And the way to love, he said, was to spread peace among all people. So that's your authority.

## Pastor James

I lost my hand [in the fighting]. That was quite a barrier at the beginning. My spiritual leader said to me, 'You cannot practise your Christian faith without forgiveness.' That opened the door. But it took three years of struggle to open up completely.

Transformation is the journey you take towards accepting the other unconditionally. You can never be like him. He can never be like you. But you can meet somewhere and melt the division. It may resolidify, but make sure that you keep the fire on.

A large group from the Northeast of India attended the 50th anniversary celebrations. They included a young cast who presented a new musical revue, *Voice of the Weaver*, dramatizing true stories from the area.



'FOR CENTURIES our region has been isolated,' said Niketu Iralu from Nagaland, who has devoted decades to working for reconciliation and development in the region. 'Now we are responding very inadequately to global impacts, with widespread corruption, lack of development and enormous violence. We are grateful for the help we get from Asia Plateau to deal with our bitterness, hate, resentments, pride, selfishness, and failure to think beyond our own tribes.'

Among those who came to Asia Plateau's opening in 1968 was a choir from the part of Assam which later became Meghalaya. They were led by Stanley Nichols-Roy, a leader of the Khasi people who for 10 years had

been pressing for separation from Assam and a state for the people of the hills. 'Many other people in the region had gone violent and my father was very worried that this was going to happen in Meghalaya,' his daughter, Barbara Thummalappally, told the conference.



'I was only 10 when my father first met IofC, but we saw an amazing change in him,' she said. 'He apologized to us all for not spending enough time with us as a father.' That change spurred him to invite political leaders from whom he had been divided to accompany him to Asia Plateau. While they were there, relations thawed between Hoover Heniewta, the leader of a rival party, and Nichols-Roy and his political colleague, Brington B Lyngdoh. They agreed to work together towards

forming the new state peacefully.

She also told how her father went to the Chief Minister of Assam, BP Chaliha, to apologize for ignoring the needs of the majority Assamese people in his concern for those of his own tribe. This opened the way for cooperation between the two leaders, a vital step towards the creation of the separate State of Meghalaya in 1971.



Sunny Mawiong, a Khasi from Meghalaya, described how his internship at Asia Plateau had opened his eyes. 'I had overlooked the other tribes within my state especially the Garos,' he said. As a result he had visited the Garo Hills, a focus of unrest, to learn about the challenges there. 'My vision is that our communities in the Northeast should carry each other's burdens.'

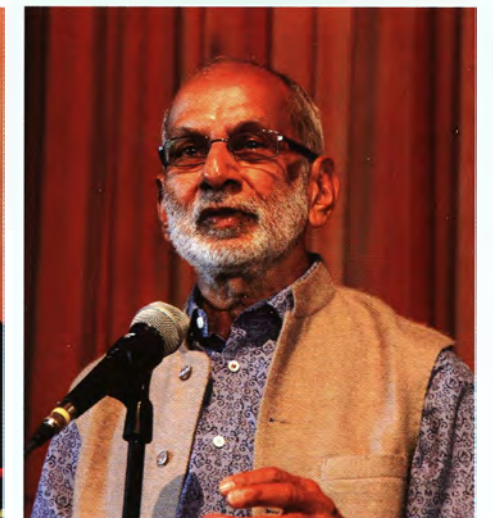


Aviko Nipo from Sechu Zubza in Nagaland apologized for his bitter hatred of mainland Indians, Bangladeshis and Nepalese living in Nagaland. 'We Nagas are a minority. I was afraid that the non-locals would take us over and that we would vanish in a few years.' He and three others have set up a community centre in Sechu Zubza, where he has opened a barber's shop, open to all communities, so that people no longer have to travel 17kms to Kohima for a haircut.

**'I was afraid that the non-locals would take us over.'**



'Change has to come from the individual,' said Visieno Talie, head of an award-winning village school in Nagaland. In 2004 the school added values education to their curriculum. 'We told the teachers not just to use a text book, but to discuss with the children and come up with projects they can do. We saw amazing changes.' She called for an exchange programme between the seven states of the Northeast 'so we can build bridges of understanding'.



'When I first encountered IofC 45 years ago, our tea firm was in serious trouble because of an eight-year industrial dispute led by a union leader whom I detested,' said Om Bagaria, an Assamese businessman and engineer. He described how 'the penny slowly dropped' that change had to begin in his own life. He went to the home of a worker who had been sick for many months and gave him the money to get treatment. 'I had never been to a worker's home before. The dispute was not in my mind, but the word spread like wildfire. A miracle happened. We sat down and in three days we sorted out the contentious issues.'

# India's unfulfilled promise

Mumbai journalist Rupa Chinai has written extensively on public health issues and has just published a book on her investigations in Northeast India, *Understanding India's Northeast - a reporter's journal*.



AS A 12-YEAR-OLD at the opening of Asia Plateau, the people who captured my imagination were those from India's Northeast. I finally went there in 1980, when I was working

with Himmat magazine. As an Indian, the experience of standing in Northeast shoes and knowing why it pinches was my first sensitization to minority aspirations.

My studies in public health taught me that, if you want to understand what has gone wrong, don't just talk to people in the village square, but go to the dwellings of the most marginalized living at the periphery. Then you will understand what has gone wrong and begin to see the whole picture. To me the Northeast was that place of beginning.

My travels in the Northeast over the

course of 30 years exposed me to individuals and communities who were full of colour and character. Their concerns and experience of being a part of the Indian nation rarely found a platform in the mainland press. They stressed the importance of recording 'the facts of history', and this I tried to do, based on how they viewed them, as against the 'mainstream' interpretation.

We in the rest of India have a lot to learn from their approach to the environment. They have long demonstrated the ancient culture of rainwater harvesting and micro-pond storage. Their traditional agriculture

practices were based on egalitarian sharing. With ownership of land and forests vested in tribal communities, they have protected the incredible biodiversity and forest cover found in this region.

With the coming of highways and natural resource extraction, our tribal communities today face enormous challenges from outside as well as from within. Many young people in the Northeast are thinking through the kind of sustainable development policies they seek. Their approach is diametrically opposed to the exploitative model being advocated by the 'mainstream' power centres.

I studied the Bodos, the plains tribal group of Assam, at a time when nobody had heard about them. Later their peaceful movement snowballed into violence. The issue was the loss of land, which brought agricultural communities to the brink of survival.

They were submerged in the majority group, their language and cultural identity were obliterated, and in the process they lost their political power and became second-class citizens in their own land.

The Indian state has a long history of pushing Northeast communities to the wall through oppressive laws, human rights violations and economic exploitation. But there is also oppression within Northeast communities. Nagaland's search for Truth and Reconciliation, pioneered by civil society groups, is a remarkable effort at initiating a lasting peace process based on transparency and accountability. It seeks to bring warring factions to one table to decide the terms of a settlement for negotiation with New Delhi. This process urgently needs Indian support.

At the time of India's Independence,

our founding fathers drafted one of the most sensitive constitutions in the world with regard to minority rights. India has failed to keep the promises this made to protect the land, political rights and cultural identity of the indigenous people.

We in the rest of India need to apply our minds to developing policies that protect tribal land, language and political identity. We must convince our policy makers that these fundamental issues of survival need to be addressed as they are a vital part of the nation building process.

*'Standing in Northeast shoes and knowing why it pinches.'*



Scenes from *Voice of the Weaver*, a musical review in which young people from Nagaland tell stories of change from their region.

## Asia Plateau's beginnings

RD MATHUR was the first Director of Asia Plateau, and oversaw the construction of the main building. He was unable to attend the event, but sent a video message.

Fifty years have gone fast. When we started thinking about Asia Plateau, Europe was recovering from the costly war that had ruined not only her buildings and cities but also her soul. Japan had left scars of bitterness, hatred and anger across Asia. The nations of Africa were struggling to find their place as independent nations, free from colonial rule.

Some of us were meeting the leaders of these nations, searching together how to architect a new future. The healing of Europe's wounds, the reconciliation of the nations of Asia with Japan, the independence of African nations, started to lay the foundations of a new world. This was the context in which we decided that we must have a base in Asia from which a new light could go to our continent.



NOW



## Thrill of the unexpected



David Young, an Englishman who had grown up in India and fought with the Indian Army during World War II, oversaw the first stages of the building of Asia Plateau. Now aged 96, he came to Panchgani to tell the story.

IN 1963 RAJMOHAN GANDHI led a March on Wheels for a 'clean, strong, united India' across eight Indian states. The same year an international lofC musical show toured the country. As a result, many young people signed up to learn more, and three training programmes for young people were held in 1964.

The first was held in Panchgani. During the 10-day programme, the participants learnt how to find a purpose in life, how to put right things that were wrong in their lives, how to work together and how to help others find change. On the last evening they invited citizens of Panchgani to come and hear what they had learnt and intended to do. This led to an invitation to lofC from a group of local people to set up a permanent centre here.

Two years later, my wife and I were asked to base in Panchgani and pursue this request, together with Indian colleagues. First we had to find if there was any land available. Next we had to find out who owned the site, and purchase it from three different owners.

Once the idea of starting a centre became known, people came to help. The first person to contribute was a widow in Pune whose daughter had attended a training programme. An Australian architect offered his services at his own expense. A young engineer from Pune, whose brother had been to a training camp, offered to check every brick laid to ensure the architect's plans were carried out meticulously.

Work on the first residential building and a small lodge began in January 1967, and they were opened in January 1968. A year later the second residential building was completed. At that point RD Mathur took over, managing the more difficult work on the central building. My wife and I returned to Europe, where we travelled to raise contributions towards the completion of the third phase.

One day, before the building had begun, we took two visitors up to the tableland above the site. As we looked down, we saw a leopard lying out on a rock below us. It was a big thrill. Next day I thought, 'This place is going to be full of unexpected happenings.'

What of the future? Many unexpected things will happen here. I envisage a time when the leaders of India and of Pakistan will meet here to plan how to give Asia a new vision. I envisage the different communities in Sri Lanka coming to pour out the riches of that island. I envisage something very new from Myanmar.

The great value of Asia Plateau is that its impact doesn't remain here, it goes out round the world.

'Asia Plateau's impact doesn't remain here, it goes out around the world.'

THEN





## Grampari



### Rural development and environmental programmes



**THIRTEEN THOUSAND** villagers now have clean drinking water thanks to Asia Plateau's Grampari centre, established 10 years ago. 'People get drinking water from springs, but open springs are often contaminated,' explained Deepak Jadhav (above), who runs the centre's governance programmes. Grampari has inspired people in 21 villages to build boxes to cover their springs. 'We also create soak pits and cover sewage canals to prevent waste water getting mixed with drinking water.'

Grampari employs 17 people and runs a residential training programme. It teaches communities to set up low waste management systems,

converting biodegradable garbage into compost, and to reduce the use of plastic. Grampari also runs handwashing programmes in 132 schools, and the government of Maharashtra has asked it to train teachers to take this programme to all the district's schools. It is estimated that handwashing with soap could save 1.2 million children's lives every year.

Much of Grampari's work focuses on 'Grampari Adopted Villages' (GAV), such as Vivar, once notorious for its conflicts, open gutters and trash, and now seen as a model. Shubhangi Autade (right), who is in charge of Grampari's Women's Involvement and Livelihood Project, described the impact on another adopted village, Akhegani. 'Women and youth started taking part in governance meetings and decision-making, and the local governance body had to pay the same



wage to the women as men,' she said. 'Warring sides have come together to do voluntary work, and women from different villages are meeting to learn from each other.' Government officials have asked Grampari to teach them about their methodology. 'A vital part of this is the practice of times of silence and the emphasis on living by moral values.'

Grampari also focuses on sustainable agriculture, using organic inputs, indigenous seeds and water harvesting, and intends to increase this aspect of its work.

### 'We decided to clean our gutters.'



**Kiran Kalambe**  
Marketing executive for ayurvedic remedies, Jarewadi

In my village there was a big fight over building a road. We went to many government offices to resolve the problem and all development stopped. Because of this, mosquitos increased and so did disease. My wife and I decided to move away.

Then I saw what Grampari had done in Vivar, which used to be a notorious village. We invited Grampari to come to Jarewadi. They explained how the village can be developed and then we had a time of silence. That whole night some psychological thing was happening in my stomach.

We decided to clean our sewage gutters, and to do the work ourselves. It was unbelievable to see an 80-year-old carry a 20kg stone on his head. How did one quiet time change peoples' attitudes so much? We also decided to use leaf plates and steel dishes instead of plastic.

We then cleaned the dirt around the house of those who had stopped us building the road. In the past we wanted to kill this man, and now we were cleaning the front of his house!

When visitors from other countries came from Asia Plateau to visit our village, our women danced for them. Earlier, when women did something we disliked, our attitude was 'You come home and we'll show you'. But because of Grampari, we realized that our women have a right to be happy, and nobody objected to their dancing.

For nine years I managed the village finances. This made me egoistic and I was harsh and rude with the older people. Now I respect them and I can't believe how kindly I talk to them.

### 'Power to take decisions for myself'



**Poonam Mandhare**  
Social entrepreneur, Paachputewadi

We are a village of 200 families. Our village was in a very bad state, but through the intervention of Grampari it has become cleaner. We have clean drinking water and the conflicts between us have begun to change. Many women have given up their addiction to tobacco. The men, women and young people have started working for the development of the village. We formed a women's federation and women now attend the official village meetings. And we started a business making reusable cloth sanitary towels, to reduce waste and pollution.

All this happened because of the practice of inner listening. My husband and I couldn't get along. I did not have freedom and my life was without joy, but through inner listening we found a change in our relationship. I had never ventured out of my house alone. I had never bought anything for myself. But one day I went to Satara and I bought something. I felt I had power to take decisions for myself. I am happy now and I want to share what I have received.

### 'Organic farming'



**Gurudutt Parthe**  
Organic farmer, rural Panchgani

Everywhere in India we see disease caused by the use of chemicals in farming. My mother died of cancer. Many farmers commit suicide because they spend so much on chemicals and make no profit. Our village has been adopted by Grampari. In a quiet time I had the idea of starting organic farming. This year I grew my rice crop using organic methods and new technology. I used to spend large sums on chemicals, but organic methods only cost me Rs 300 as against Rs 3000. And my land, which was being destroyed, is now becoming more fertile.

## Villagers take charge of development



## Industrial Programmes

In 1973, responding to a request from the management of Khatau Textile Mills, Asia Plateau ran its first Effective Living and Leadership course for industrial workers. Later the Heart of Effective Living course for senior managers was added. These programmes offer practical ways of resolving conflict at work and at home and now run once a month at Asia Plateau.

### No more 'them' and 'us'

Jacob Verghese, General Manager, Human Resources for SKF India Ltd, shared his company's experience.



said they didn't want a memento, they wanted money. The argument went on for six months, relations were strained, production was impacted and the atmosphere was vicious. The new Managing Director decided that things needed to be transformed.

Ever since joining SKF, the Managing Director had been suggesting that we should send our employees to Asia

Plateau, as his previous company had benefited from the courses there. I joined the company in 2012, and in 2013 we sent the first batch. Since then, 400 of our employees have taken part in the Effective Living and Leadership (ELL) programme.

Today we talk about 'us' not 'them and us'. There has been no protest in the last five years. The union used to go to the senior management with an unresolved complaint almost every 10 days, but now they only meet the Managing Director or Director of Human Resources at ceremonies and functions. Issues are resolved mutually with the Factory Management team, as trust and understanding has been transformed.

Absenteeism has gone down for many

individuals. In a recent survey of the managers, supervisors and families of those who had been to ELL, nearly two thirds said the programme had led to a positive change. When we interact with the families at functions, their wives say, 'Why didn't you send them 20 years ago?' Men, who used to be angry if they didn't get their food on time, now help at home by washing the dishes.

The SKF group has acknowledged the change – the head of the global union had long discussions with our union when he visited India last year, to find out why nothing was being escalated from Pune any more. He was full of praise for the trust between the union and management. Recently one of the top global management asked us what we had done to change the energy on the factory floor, which he said was totally different from what he had seen in the past. ELL is one of many initiatives which has played a role in this cultural transformation.

Our Pune factory was the first in the SKF group to be awarded the Platinum Award for Indian Manufacturing Excellence. Everyone feels that the ELL programme has played a pivotal role in the shift in people's mindsets. Our factory in Ahmedabad, 750 kilometres away, now also sends employees to ELL.

**'Totally different energy on the factory floor.'**

**AT SKF WE CLAIM** that everything, other than the Earth itself, moves on the bearings we manufacture. We are a Swedish organization, with six factories in India.

Our factory in Pune, set up in 1965, has 1,200 employees. It had a very strange management union relationship. There were no big fights or strikes, except in 1978. But there was a strong attitude of 'us' and 'them', and there were protests in various forms including boycotts of canteen food and even slowing down of production. The trust quotient between management and union was low.

The group decided to mark SKF's centenary in 2010 by giving mementos to all its employees across the globe. The employees in Pune

## Partnership with Tata

The centre has had a long training partnership with the Tata group of companies in Jamshedpur, including the Human Relations at Work programme, which trained 24,000 employees of Tata Motors between 1980 and 1987. Biren Bhuta worked with Tata Steel's Tribal Initiatives programme until December 2017.



ago we decided to relaunch our outreach programmes. Since then we have run 140 programmes for over 7,000 young people, especially from tribal communities in Jharkhand and Odisha.

There have been huge benefits, for the participants, their families and their communities, and also for our corporate social responsibility team. The experience has helped

**A FEW YEARS BACK** Tata Steel ran an ad campaign which said, 'Values are stronger than steel'. The Tata Group's philosophy is that the community is not just a stakeholder in the company, it is the very purpose of its existence.

For many years Tata Steel used to send both managers and union members to Asia Plateau for conferences, and programmes also took place in Jamshedpur with outreach to the villages. Seven years

us to rediscover ourselves, to find our own life missions, and to become grounded. These young people don't wear masks. And that's disturbing, because we put on so many masks.

Working in Jharkhand, I've been fascinated and inspired by the tribal worldview. I believe we need indigenous thought and wisdom. Some 200 years ago, Chief Seattle pointed out that the Earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the Earth. Indigenous communities live by this: and we must, too, if we are

to save ourselves. If leadership can develop among tribal youth across different parts of India, they will show the world a thing or two about how to live.

Last May, 95 tribal youth from 20 Indian states came to Asia Plateau for a training programme. They responded warmly, and we keep in touch with them.

Every November we organize a national tribal conclave in Jamshedpur. This year participants also came from Australia, Canada, Kenya and Zimbabwe. More than 1,500 tribal youth congregated, and as well as celebrating their tribal identity, they found a platform to talk about their anguish. The space for dissent is diminishing fast in our country and round the world. That is why we call this programme Samvaad, which means conversations or dialogues. During the Samvaad we also held a leadership programme for 400 tribal youth from around India.

**'These young people don't wear masks.'**

The Caux Initiatives for Business (CIB) programme for CEOs has chapters in Pune, Mumbai, Lucknow and Jamshedpur and held an international conference at Asia Plateau in February 2018.



## Governance programmes

Since 2003, the IC Centre for Governance in Delhi, inspired by Asia Plateau, has worked to strengthen ethical values in government and the public sector. Over 400 members of the Indian Administrative Service have attended courses on Ethics in Public Governance at Asia Plateau.

### Ministry of Happiness

One of the latest initiatives is a collaboration between Asia Plateau and Madhya Pradesh's new 'Ministry of Happiness' (Rajya Anand Sansthan). The state's Additional Chief Secretary, Iqbal Singh Bains, explained.



**WHEN I FIRST** came here to Asia Plateau in 2012, I was cynical, but I stayed for a week and something of me stayed back.

When the Chief Minister of a state announces that there will be a 'Ministry of Happiness', it arouses both curiosity and scepticism. How is the State Government going to supply happiness to the citizens? We are trained to give tangible outputs, but how can you measure happiness?

I was clueless when I was told to set up the department. Well-wishers gave me all sorts of unsolicited advice – to set up casinos, for instance. I held workshops with people I thought would help me design the roadmap but got nothing out of them. So I took three decisions. I would not set up any bureaucracy – the department would be run by volunteers. I would keep it free from belief systems. I would not mix it up with entertainment.

With these boundaries, we set up a small institution and framed our policy. Then we started registering volunteers – we now have 40,000. We selected 8,000 clusters of villages and organized a Festival of Joy, with games and cultural events to introduce the idea to people.

Next we designed a programme called Alpviram,

or 'Pause'. I had learnt about inner listening from IofC and I wanted to take it to a larger group of people. In the last couple of months, in collaboration with Initiatives of Change, we have trained some 200 volunteers to spread this message in government offices.

Other tools include the Anand calendar, which encourages people to devote a month to forgiveness, another to gratitude and so on. We have set up 180 Anandam (Joy of Giving) centres where people can exchange their surplus goods. We have invited volunteers to form Anand Clubs, which are primarily engaged in social service. We have trained teachers to run life skills modules in 30 schools in Bhopal. An online 'happiness course' is due to start soon, and we will offer Anand Fellowships for academic research.

We have enlisted three organizations – Art of Living, Initiatives of Change and the Isha Foundation, Bhopal – to run four-day programmes open to everybody in the State Government, from peon to senior officers.

The UN World Happiness Report ranks India 118th in the world, but this is not a correct picture as it was based on a survey of only 3,000 people. We are developing our own happiness index, with a survey due to start in May.

'We have trained 200 volunteers to spread inner listening in government offices.'

## Education programmes

In the last 25 years thousands of teachers and school staff have taken part in Education Today, Society Tomorrow workshops at Asia Plateau. The programme bridges the divide between government and private schools, and between levels in the school hierarchy. One of those who brings staff to Asia Plateau regularly is Lakshmi Kumar, Director of the Orchid School in Pune.

### Breaking through the barriers



**ASIA PLATEAU** is one of the most hopeful places on earth. I wanted the 160 staff at our school to be inspired. In our education system today we are divided, ghettoized and sectionized, whereas here we meet diverse educational systems and communities.

Fifteen years ago we had our first full staff retreat at Asia Plateau. Some had thought it was not possible, because of the huge logistical issues. And the families of the support staff had lots of doubts. The men asked, 'Where are you taking our women?' I said, 'To a very safe zone and they will come back transformed.' I guess they were a bit worried about transformation too. I also bullied my board members to come, because you need to influence the power holders as well.

Our schools are highly hierarchical. So I decided that we would choose who would share bedrooms by lottery. I was chosen to share a room with one of the service staff. She broke down at the thought of

sharing a room with the director. I realized how costly the caste, class and education system can be. Trust has been broken for generations.

I formed a team to look at segregation in the school. It started with the dining room. Some teachers began to sit down with the support staff. The children noticed that people who in the past hadn't sat together were even sharing lunch boxes. We made a conscious effort to include the support staff in all our spaces – not as a favour but out of respect for them as part of the therapeutic community. We still have further to go, but you should see the women – and men – now!

As educationists, we are privileged to work with the future. Our textbooks lie. So we need a transformed mindset in our teachers. Then they can read what's written in the textbook and connect it to reality. But of course we are also a product of the same education system, so we have to address our own hypocrisies and prejudices.

'I realized how costly the caste and class system can be.'



# Youth programmes

Creating the space for courage

The creation of Asia Plateau was inspired by the tremendous response of young Indians to Rajmohan Gandhi's march across the country in 1963. While the centre now offers programmes for all ages and areas of life, youth are still at the heart of its activities.



are aimless. We bring young people to Asia Plateau for five days, and let the silence work on them. We create the space where they can meet themselves, learn to take risks and find courage.'

At the beginning of June every year, close to 200 young people come to Asia Plateau for an eight-day life-changing experience, Let's Make a Difference (LMAD). This programme for school and university students started in 1994 and is anchored by Viral Mazumdar with a team of coordinators. LMAD regional chapters meet regularly.

For the last 20 years, Asia Plateau has trained future business leaders studying at Symbiosis International (Deemed University) in Pune. Each year some 700-800 students take part in the four-day personal leadership course, which encourages them to create answers to world problems, through their personal and professional choices.

**THE LATEST OF** these youth programmes is Lead for Change (LfC), which focuses on young executives and professionals. 'India has more young people than any other country, with 600 million under 25,' says Mayur Shah, who initiated LfC in 2016 with his brother, Parag. 'We have so many young people trying to do and be so many things; and that makes them end up under tremendous pressure.

'Many in our cities and rural areas

So far, 230 young people from India and abroad have participated in Asia Plateau's five-month volunteer-cum-interns programme.

Asia Plateau was the base for five batches the international venture, Action for Life (AfL), which took participants to many Asian countries.

Initiatives of Change for Life (IfL) gave young people a three-year opportunity to get a deeper experience of lofC on the ground in different parts of India and on a visit to Sri Lanka.

lofC Outreach, a new venture launched to mark the centre's 50th year, will take young people around India to share their experiences of lofC. By April 2018, one group had been to Jamshedpur and the Northeast of India conducting programmes for a variety of audiences, while another was visiting cities in the South.

At the conference, past participants in Asia Plateau's youth programmes spoke of what they owe to them:

## Alison Hayes, New Zealand

I teach in a primary school, with many children from the Pacific and Maori community. My lofC experience, including Action for Life, has helped me in working with our culturally diverse staff and being open to the perspectives of the children and their families.

Many of my students come from dysfunctional families where they experience violence and abuse. My class is a safe space, where they learn to respect each other. The practice of quiet reflection is central. At the end of each day we have a thank you circle, where we are grateful to someone for something kind they have done. After

lunch, when the children come into class agitated from playground fights, we sit quietly, let go of hurts, calm ourselves and then we are ready for learning.

I have a vision for my country where we care for the marginalized, face our colonial past honestly and where our social environment is as beautiful as the natural one.

**'Quiet reflection is central.'**



## Ann Njeri Kimanathi, Kenya

Ten years ago I spent six months here as an intern. The programme changed my life: the quiet times, the quiet days, the joint prayer sessions, the religious diversity, the cultural diversity, the mentoring by senior friends, the quality and personal attention each person received. The

**'I discovered who I was.'**

challenge to live a life beyond myself, the amazing visitors with inspiring stories, the singing, the dancing, the eating together. I discovered who I was. My life found meaning and I discovered my calling to be a creator of peace. I returned home with fire in my belly and got involved with lofC's programmes in Kenya, building peace and community.

## Wangyal, Tibet

I was born in Tibet, and came to India at the age of six as a refugee. With Initiatives of Change for Life (IfL) I travelled widely in India and Sri Lanka. It extended my heart towards others. I used to hate the Chinese and always wanted to take revenge. IfL made me ask myself whether I am the kind of person that a future

Tibet really needs. It led me to think from the other's perspective as well. Here I have met young Chinese, and discovered that we can understand each other and be friends.

**'I used to hate the Chinese.'**



## Deepak Ajwani, India

I used to come here over 20 years ago to youth camps [LMAD], and then spent a year with lofC in the UK after my post-graduate degree. What I learnt has formed the bedrock of my personal life. I run a business website, 365 days, 24/7. People in my workplace don't understand why I trust people so quickly and don't get angry. I have discovered that what you learn here you can put into practice in the cut-throat media world. These learnings are for real, applicable in your day-to-day life, and they make a difference.

**'Practical peacebuilding'**

## Wimarshana Ranasinghe, Sri Lanka

I first came to Asia Plateau as an intern after completing my bachelor's in peacebuilding. My three months here made me a different person. In 2014 I returned as part of IfL. I learnt more here about practical peacebuilding than I had in university. We travelled all over India, meeting government officials, university and school students, villagers and former militants. Through this journey we were able to build meaningful friendships with people who did not speak the same language as ours.

**'Bedrock of my personal life'**



**'I stopped comparing myself.'**

## Keshab Dahal, Nepal

Here at Asia Plateau I realized that everybody is learning. Before I came I was always comparing myself to others. I used to feel inferior when I thought someone was higher than me and to find satisfaction from looking down at those whom I thought were lower. At Asia Plateau I experienced the real sense of equality among individuals and my idea of comparing people ceased at once.

## Neivisalie Rhatsu, Nagaland

My grandfather was beaten several times by the Indian army. My father told me how the Indian army burnt their house, and they had only one potato a day to eat. So I was full of hate towards Indian people, carrying all the fear with me.

When I was young I had a fight with the son of an Indian soldier. He was big and I was small, but my friend joined me and we beat him up. When I went home after my internship here, I told my friend, 'I think we did something wrong.' I found the courage to ask forgiveness from Indian people for the anger and fear I carried with me.

**'Courage to ask forgiveness'**



## Voice of the Parents

Hemang and Sneha Kulkarni



Our son had been going through severe depression for two years. He was showing great resolve and fighting it with the help of medicine. But his lack of success was pulling him down and he was very moody. He had closed all his sensory inputs. When he decided to attend a Lead for Change camp at Asia Plateau, we were worried about how he would cope.

To our surprise he returned a changed person. He started talking to people

and making plans for the future. He took responsibility at home and became more aware of saving water and electricity. Within three months he found work, and moved to Chennai, where he faced water and electricity shortages, and a breakdown in mobile communications, caused by storms, social unrest and demonetization. We are proud of the way he managed, and that he was ready to share with us what he was going through.

### Padyatra (walk for change)

Himanshu Bharat and Biplab Mahato told the conference how they had walked with a group of young people inspired by lofC through three districts of Jharkhand. They covered 350 kms in two months and connected with over 200,000 people.



### Santakavyaitris of Maharashtra (Women poet-saints of Maharashtra)

On the first evening of the conference, Jacqui Daukes (top) and Shruthi Vishwanath (bottom) presented an evening on the women poet-saints of Maharashtra. Jacqui Daukes had translated their poems, written many centuries ago, into English, and this had inspired Shruthi Vishwanath to set the originals to music, with the help of a grant from the India Foundation for the Arts. She performed the songs with Shruतेन्द्रा Katagade on the tabla.



The anniversary conference offered glimpses of most of the initiatives and programmes taking place in India today. Delegates commented on the quality of leadership they sensed and some said it had made them take a new look at their own life and work.

The teamwork and cooperation of the lofC fellowship in organizing this inspiring mega event were heartening. The organizing team was led by a busy IT professional, David Sharon, whose mother and grandfather were involved with Asia Plateau from its early days. David and the host of people who worked with him preferred to remain in the background. They included, among others, Kiran Gandhi, Leena Khatri, Parag Shah, Siddharth Singh, Stephanie Menezes and the AP administration team. The trustees of Friends of Moral Re-Armament (India) wish to express their profound gratitude.

Executive Committee, lofC, India.

## The Future



LAST YEAR ABOUT 100 programmes took place at Asia Plateau, with nearly 4,000 participants and 400 facilitators. Many requests had to be turned away (because of lack of accommodation).

In addition to all the programmes we already run, we dream of

establishing a leadership development centre, to train the bright young people who will lead society, community and government in the future. We envisage a year or two of intensive training, both here and in the field.

One constraint on expansion is the number of beds at Asia Plateau. We have some 100 rooms. They are designed

for four, but that is not really feasible. We have many programmes for senior officials, who would prefer single rooms.

In 1966, the architect of Asia Plateau produced a masterplan, with four residential buildings, of which we built two. Land was set aside for expansion, and the Trustees of Friends of Moral Re-Armament (India) believe the time has come to work on this. We plan to create one more residential building, and ten apartments for faculty members who are based at Asia Plateau longterm.

The cost is estimated at Rs 100 million. This centre was made possible by thousands of people who gave what they could, out of sacrifice. We invite you to help in taking Asia Plateau to its next level.

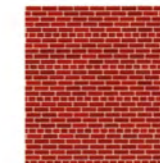
Suresh Vazarani  
Trustee, Friends of Moral Re-Armament (India)



Donate a brick  
Rs 25,000



Donate a tile  
Rs 100,000



Donate a wall  
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Rs 1,000,000

Donations may be made by bank transfer (for details: [finance@in.iofc.org](mailto:finance@in.iofc.org)) or cheque/draft favouring 'Friends of Moral Re-Armament (India)' and sent to MRA-Initiatives of Change, Panchgani – 412805, District Satara, Maharashtra, India. Donations are tax exempt under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act.

Asia Plateau holds workshops, seminars and training programmes throughout the year except for the two months of heavy rains. While some focus on specific groups, such as business people, government officers, industrial employees, educators, youth and so on, others are open to all. International conferences on general themes also take place, as well as a biannual business conference organized by Caux Initiatives for Business with Japanese collaboration.

Some of the regular programmes include:

**Heart of Effective Leadership (HEL)** for senior management in business and industry, held most months

**Effective Living and Leadership (ELL)**, each with a focus on different areas – industry (usually once a month), education, youth, children, students, NGO leaders and families

**Education Today Society Tomorrow (ETST)** for educators. India's department of education wants more of these to take place, with some specially for school principals.

**Ethics in Public Governance** for government officers of the All India Service (IAS, IPS, Indian Railways) and Public Undertakings – held in collaboration with IC Centre for Governance (ICCG)

**Family programmes** over some weekends in addition to the longer annual ELLs for families

**Let's Make a Difference (LMAD)** from 1 to 8 June every year, for 16 to 30-year-olds

**Lead for Change (Lfc)** for young executives and professionals, but open to all aged between 20 and 35

Programme for **Institute of National Integration (INI)** – religious teachers and other officers of the Indian Army

**Alpviram (short pause)** – Art of Inner Listening, a specially designed programme for the officers of Madhya Pradesh's Rajya Anand Sansthan (Ministry of Happiness)

**Training of Trainers (ToT)** to enable past participants to conduct workshops in their regions to meet the increasing demand

Participants in all these programmes are encouraged to come with their spouses. The experience, often referred to by people as the 'magic of Asia Plateau', becomes even richer when the spouses join in!