

Let's Make a Difference Youth Conference - June 1 - 8, 2014

The LMAD National Youth Conference of 2014 marks the 20th Conference conducted at Asia Plateau. The first National Youth Conference goes way back to 1994. Since then every year from 1st June to 8th June, certain number of highly motivated people who have been involved with the idea and values of Initiatives of Change (IoFC) and are committed to creating value in the society come together and help conduct this conference.

This year twenty two young women and men from, all of whom being past participants of the conference came together and took up the role of a coordinator to help in spreading the values and philosophy of IoFC. These people's lives have changed thanks to the teachings of the conference. A majority of them were helping for the very first time and hence, they were trained during the co-ordinators workshop prior to the conference about leadership, team work, group discussions and the co-ordinator's way of life. This year's conference is as important as every other conference as it carries with it a legacy of over two decades of bringing change to the youth of this country.



The 'Let's Make A Difference' Youth Conference - A Report

A majority of today's youth in India have become slaves to technology and the social media. They lack direction, clarity of thought and are disconnected from their life's purpose. They are unaware of the giant potential slumbering inside them that is waiting to be tapped upon. If used then they will be able to accomplish great things and add value to the society, the country and everything around them. India comprises of the highest youth population in the world and about 50% of its population is the youth. Every third person in an Indian city today is a youth. It is currently the youngest country in the world. India is set to experience a dynamic transformation by 2020. The youth has a very important role to play in the development of this country and taking it to a greater level nationally and internationally. The youth will also be responsible towards guiding the people who are far younger than them and build their future.

This year our country witnessed one of the most important elections in its history since independence. For the very first time, a government won with a clear majority and no

coalition government was formed. A majority of the voters were young Indians (Youth) who exercised their right to vote and brought about a change in this country that has been plagued with scams, corruption and deceit by the previous government. The participation of the youth in the elections was a sign that they want change and will certainly do anything to bring about change.

A lot of young people are cracking competitive exams, starting new businesses and giving jobs, representing the country in international arenas such as sports, debates, etc... They are also occupying important positions in the corporate world. Our country has been witness to a lot of achievements by the youth. Abraham Lincoln once said- "that some achieve great success, is proof to all that others can achieve it as well".

With a certain amount of discipline, dedication and commitment they can make a roadmap of their future and achieve their dreams. However, they should have the right values that define their character and personality. Our mission as always is to guide them and share the message of LMAD which will strengthen them and uplift them to another level whereby, they will experience "change".

A total of 194 people from various age groups and different walks of life walked through the gates of Asia Plateau to attend the conference. They came from different parts of India and have heard about the magic of this conference from previous participants and co-ordinators and other sources. We also had the pleasure of hosting two participants who came all the way from Kenya and Sri Lanka. We also witnessed a lot of refreshers coming back to attend this conference. Each participant had a story to tell and a dream to share.

The co-ordinators were participants who had done very well in previous conferences and have experienced change at a greater level. They carry the philosophy of IofC and live by its values in the outside world. They have taken steps to change in their own lives, they have faith that even others can change and they feel obliged to help other people who are currently on the same road that they once walked. Therefore, it was decided that they would be the speakers of the inauguration. The Inauguration was held without calling a guest speaker.

A wonderful ceremonial dance performance by the Co-ordinating team and the lighting of the lamp by Aishwarya Deshpande with a prayer dance signalled the inauguration of the conference and kept the participants in anticipation of what was going to come. The welcome dance was choreographed by Rohit Nayar. Rachit Khatri and Dipti Rane are two senior co-ordinators in the team. They have been coming for the conferences for a very long time. They were the voice of the youth. And both spoke about their journey with Lets Make a Difference and the change that they experienced.

Dipti, a merchandiser from Mumbai shared her story of change as follows: "Today I want to share with you, my story of personal change, this change was gradual and it took some time to show up. In the beginning, knowing me was a challenge because what we appear externally is not what we actually are. The powerful question - Who am I? It really shook me and made me to take a deep dive within, to know how filthy and dirty I was from inside. I used to feel very jealous of people when they would perform better than me, when people would deserve a pat on their backs and when they would deserve appreciation from others. This feeling of jealousy filled my mind with contaminated thoughts for them. I would never think or speak well about them and I would try to perform better, only because I wanted to show them down but never with a healthy feeling to explore my potential or to give my best. Later, I started realizing that this feeling of jealousy only takes me away from people and that my mind was getting filthier with unwanted thoughts. Today I look at such people with reverence; I look at them as an inspiration and try to imbibe their good values and qualities in myself. I want to replicate those good achievements. Now even when I perform or deliver work better

than them, it is only with an intention to give my best and to work to the fullest of my ability. Now I compete with myself and want to better my best but it is never with a feeling of jealousy. I thank my inner guidance to help me overcome this destructive feeling.

Rachit, a graphic designer from Pune delivered a message that was short and crisp pertaining to his story of change: "I was told about this conference by my elder brother. And after I attended the first conference, I have been coming regularly since then. Everything that we do here has a reason and a thought process behind it, which gradually comes together and ignites the change within oneself. I have experienced that beautiful change within myself. A lot of people, whom I spend most of my time with, have witnessed the transformation in me from a shy 16 year old school boy to what I am today and I must admit that the credit goes to LMAD."

The sharing by each co-ordinator created an electric atmosphere in the auditorium and set the momentum of the inauguration.

Harshal Thakare, an engineering student from Nagpur shared as follows: "We all know the river, from its origin to its final destination. Consider river Ganga, at the beginning it is so pure but as it starts moving ahead we find how dirty it becomes. I look at myself as a river. I am 21 years old. As I start growing and understanding things I started carrying good as well as bad things within me. Some of the bad things were clearly visible but many of them were dissolved completely within me. At some point of time in my life bad was more than good, from absolute pure water I turned to a very dirty one, not of any use just like mud.

And one day I met this Idea of change before three years. The process of the change started with values and teachings of this conference. Today I am trying to achieve state of absolute purity and I am trying to become natural which I was earlier. I thank god for introducing this water treatment plant to me, which is helping me to change my own self from mud to pure water again. Thanks to LMAD for giving us this weapon of change for me and my country. Thank you all."

Another co-ordinator Shreeya Gandhi, an architect from Pune shared as follows: "I have been associated with this conference since 2012. When I had first come here I was a lost and confused person. I did not know what I exactly wanted in my life in terms of relationships, career, etc... I was searching for calm and I was trying to solve a puzzle. The conference started and took me by surprise as it wasn't a regular conference. Right from the start the way in which people of my age welcomed me struck cord with me. As it proceeded I saw a mirror of myself for the first time. As I measured my life against the morals taught here, I knew I was falling very short.

The sessions started reaching in my heart and I started feeling life. I learnt from a hundred different stories. It shook me in a very positive way. I changed my overall perspective and I was led into a beautiful journey of self-discovery. Tears flowed into a new start. All my negativity evaporated within eight days. This Journey has been full of ups and downs but has given inner strength. I welcome all of you to be a part of this family. Hope you make lifelong relations in these eight days and experience a great change in yourselves."

The story by each co-ordinator was different and strong. Each story comprised of hurt, pain, sorrow, and happiness at the realization. It was fresh and it struck a chord with each and every participant. There were tears being shed and a lot of the participants were waiting to go on this journey.

A wonderful skit was enacted by the co-ordinators which focused on the concept of the LMAD chip. The story revolved around the benefit of attending the conference and it also

went on to explain how a person changes after absorbing the teachings of the conference.

The Inauguration ended on a thunderous applause from the participants.

Quiet time is a ritual that is practiced every day during the conference. The main purpose of having a disciplined quiet time is to get to know yourself and listen to your inner voice. We live in a world that is constantly moving and we listen to each and everything and everyone around us. But we don't ever listen to ourselves in the midst of all the noise around us. Like the roots of a tree hold a tree up and provide it with all nutrients to live, the quiet time is the roots for humans. No one knows how we are inside except us. Roots are deep and there are many. If you look good from the inside, you will look good from the outside. Our inner voice is a connection between ourselves and the universe (God). The inner voice knows us at a very deep level and it guides us in many ways we are unaware of. Our inner voice has the answer to all of life's problems. It shows us the path when we are lost. A lot of us are disconnected from our inner voice. The habit of a quiet time was new for most of the participants. They were introduced to the "diary". They were told to write down their thoughts during the quiet time and make the diary their friend. The diary also acts like a mirror, that knows everything about the writer and it also serves as a source of learning. Many participants realize a lot of things when they write down.

One co-ordinator shared about her first quiet time as follows: " I remember that on this very day, I was sitting in one these chairs last year when I was first introduced to the quiet time. I had done my first quiet time near the Magnolia terrace. For the first ten minutes, nothing came to my mind. I didn't know what to write. So, I started to watch the beautiful nature outside and I realised that there are many things which we can learn from the nature.

When I looked at the sun, it taught me to be punctual. The huge mountains were telling me to aim high. The chirping birds showed how to live my life to the fullest. The tall trees told me to catch the sunshine of tomorrow whereas, their bending branches taught me to be down to earth always. I used to see these things every day. But, this place made to think from a different perspective.

Also, I would like to tell you all the importance of this diary. I request you all to write whatever comes to your mind in this diary. Because, after going back from here, this will act as your guiding force. It will be for keeps. Last but not the least, quiet time is not about THINKING, but it's about LISTENING to your inner voice."

The scenic beauty of Asia Plateau and the atmosphere plays a pivotal role in having a Quality Quiet time. The question based quiet time helped them focus on special areas that needed attention. It has revealed to them their fears, emotions, their thoughts and has shown a mirror image of the persons they are internally. This time during the conference a total of twenty two hours was put into having a quiet time.

Some participants shared about their first quiet time as follows:

- "I have decided to take charge of my career and I will not do anything for the sake of it."
- "I was feeling sleepy initially as I am not used to being quiet this early in the morning. I was counting the birds and listening to the small sounds around me such as the muffled voice of the elders. I am a long way from connecting to my inner voice but I shall definitely practice this ritual in order to listen to it."
- "I have never had the privilege of seeing the beauty of nature anywhere. I smiled at myself. I realised during this quiet time that I take a long time to forgive. I will henceforth try for giving people a little sooner."

- "I have read the full diary during the quiet time and I have realised that I have to make my own rules and live life as per my own terms."

Daily many participants shared about their thoughts and revelations during the quiet time after each session. Each sharing was a lesson and a revelation. There were tears of joy, sadness and a lot of emotions coming out during the sharing sessions. Many felt liberated and many began to filter out all the unnecessary thoughts and began to focus. They connected at a very deep level. Quiet time shall always remain as the thread of the conference.

Disciplined quiet time also encourages the participants to write. One improves her/his writing skills and over a short span of time, one discovers the joy of writing. In this era, many of us resort to typing things out in the computer and mobile phones. However, the data typed in such devices tends to get deleted due to technical issues and is hence, not permanent. By writing, one can remember what he has written for a very long time and the writing remains permanent in the book. It is proof of what you think. Daily writing also improves one's handwriting and also enables one to think deeply and in great detail. Writing is an art and a lot can be learnt through writing. It also improves our communication skills and increases our command over the language (in this case- English).



Participants having a quiet time in Asia plateau

The philosophy of IofC revolves around four important values- Purity, Honesty, Unselfishness and Love (PHUL). These four values are the foundation to strengthening one's personality and character. These four values also define who you are and what you think. In today's world, there are hardly talks about moral and ethical values. All the co-ordinators and the refreshers have been exposed to these four standards in the past conferences and have taken the challenge to live their lives by these four standards. These four standards serve as a guiding light to all the co-ordinators by showing them a way to conduct themselves in the outside world. However, it is very challenging to live by these four standards in the outside world as we normally tend to fall back to the way we once were. The coordinating team shared their experience of learning and understanding the philosophy of LMAD.

One coordinator shared her experience on learning the ABC of MRA:

"The ABC's of MRA are just like the four legs of a table. If one is broken, the table becomes useless. Purity, Honesty, Unselfishness and Love are these four values which plays an important role in our life. I would like to speak on Love. Last year when I had come for this conference for the first time, I came with the confidence that my life is perfect and there is nothing such which I need to change.

As I started interacting more with other participants, I got to know that many of them had strain relations with their family. After hearing some of their family problems, I found myself to be lucky to have strong and happy relations with my parents. But after I came to know the ABC's of MRA, I realised that 'Love' was something on which I had to work.

As I am good at academics, I used to get what I want. My parents always used to gift me something which I wanted to have. They used to fulfil all my needs. I never understood their unconditional love. I realised that there was a need to express my love. There was a need to love them too, unconditionally. This place made me realise the difference between selfish love and unconditional love. As soon as I went back home, I gave a tight hug to my mom and said that 'I love you'. She was in tears. For the first time in my life I was very happy. I felt my mind at peace. It was one of the wonderful moments which I cherish all the time.

I would like to conclude by saying, the clouds sail across the sky, they teach us to move on, seek horizons and explore new vistas. From this conference I learnt to believe in the impossible; hold tight to the incredible and to live the life to its fullest potential. That's when we can make a difference in this world."

Another coordinator shared her story as follows: "I will speak on love. I have a twin brother. We are always compared by people around us in everything we do. He used to score better marks than me. People used to praise him crazily and downgrade or dislike me so much that it use to affect me in a very negative manner and I began to think that I was useless. I had no friends and I thought he was destroying my life but after going through this for a long time there came a thought from inside that what has he done wrong if he is better in certain things and people go gaga over him. It's not his fault so why should I not trust him, love him and give him a chance excluding all the external factors affecting our life.

Since that thought came to my mind my life has completely changed and today this day we are a lifeline for each other. Change has not come overnight it took me a long time to bridge that gap and once we began to share he also took steps. So things changed for the better.

Another coordinator shared as follows: "I went out of my city for my studies. As I started living away from the family, I started disrespecting my father and my family. I was always bothered about my needs, my shopping, and I constantly asked him for money. I never realised that he worked many hours and put in a lot of hard work to send me money so that I can study and live properly. He was so unselfish in his ways and I did not realise it until I came here. Once I went back home, I started loving him more and started treating him with respect. I even started helping him handle his business in a small aspect.

One coordinator shared his story as follows: "During my first conference, I was introduced to these four standards. I was sceptical about them initially and I had doubts. I let my doubts win and have their day. My life got into a mess after the first conference and I did not change in anyway. I later came back to attend this conference again in 2013 and I was determined to change. It was then that I realised that these four

standards had meaning and they were a good way to measure one's self and one's life. I accepted them.

I love my mother very much. But I never ever showed love to her. I did not express it at all to her. Loving someone and showing it are two different things and I did not realise this. I never appreciated the fact that she worked a lot to make my life comfortable. I used to be the only person to carry tiffin to college and I never appreciated her for this. I did not even bother helping her in the household chores. Earlier my approach towards my mother was not right, but now it is different.

I however am struggling with unselfishness. Ever since I started working, I got sucked into my work and I did not take time out to meet my friends who constantly call me up asking me to meet them. I tell them that I am busy. I have not taken the time to build my relationship with them. I don't want to reach a stage where they stop calling me. I will take out time to build these relationships with them and not take them for granted."

Another coordinator shared his story as well: "The first time I came for this conference was in 2009 and that was the time when I was introduced to this concept of PHUL (Purity, Honesty, Unselfishness and Love). The most important value which touched me was Unconditional Love. My relationship with my mother was not good and I never valued the things which she did for me. There were at times when I used to scream at her without realising how she would feel. I would like to share a small incident with you. I was in my 11th standard when my school trip was organised for Amritsar and Kullu-Manali. I wanted to go there desperately but my dad didn't allow me. My mother knowing how desperately I wanted to go, convinced my dad and also spoke to my Principal and requested her to make necessary arrangements for my trip and allowed me to go for the trip in such short notice. In my childhood days I was bought up in a middle class family and for us Diwali occasion we used to wear new clothes. She was the one who wouldn't buy a saree for herself but never forget to bring new clothes for us. After this conference the relationship with my mother drastically improved but last year my mother passed away and somewhere deep down my heart I still have regret in my heart that I couldn't give her the unconditional love which she deserved from me and today I just pray that she forgives me for all wrong things which I have done to her."

All the co-ordinators spoke on the values of Honesty, Love and unselfishness. The later part of the session focused on the value of Purity. It was explained that purity can be seen in the form of speaking a language using good and clean words. Purity also meant that one should not sexualize the opposite sex in their thoughts or words or actions. One should look at them with a clean set of eyes. Purity also meant thinking good thoughts and not corrupting our minds with negative thoughts and evils such as pornography. Purity refers to being clean inside rather than the outside.

Few of the participants shared after introspecting on these four standards are as follows:

"I always took my family for granted and I am given to laziness. I heard my inner voice speak to me and I was quiet uncomfortable listening to it but I decided to listen to it. I shall spend more time with my mother and I shall be more empathetic.

"I realise that I am a betrayer and a liar. I had the courage to recall my bad moments even though I did not want to do so initially. I am not a truly happy person."

"My heart was beating fast and I was crying after evaluating myself against the four standards. Change hurts me and I wanted to get back to my comfort zone. I hope to find answers to the questions that I have."

Likewise, many participants made commitments to live their life around these four standards and make them a part of their personality.

Enjoying with friends is one good feeling, but enjoying with new friends and bonding with them is definitely another very good feeling. The picnic to Mahabaleshwar witnessed participants bonding and enjoying themselves with one another like old friends who have known each other for ages. This was carried forward to the rooms as well after the picnic. All the participants bonded with their respective roommates and they all got to know each other very well. Each participant got to know their roommates at a deeper level. Each one spoke about his background and their objective of attending the youth conference. They also discussed their contribution towards making India a better country. A lot of things were shared and discussed at a personal level as well. The bonding between the participants was also evident outside their rooms and even within the groups as well. Even when they had to prepare a skit for the evening around their respective group names, they got along like a house on fire and worked together to put up a good show as a group.

The morning sessions before quite time are important and they set the tone of the day. Each session comprises of exercises that forms the questions for the quiet time. These exercises teach us to look within ourselves. From one morning session the participants observed that one should cleanse herself/himself of the negativity that has been accumulated over the years. The negativity can be in the form of vices, negative thoughts, bad habits, etc... Sometimes our ego prevents us from looking within and accepting our faults. When we apply the four standards along with disciplined quiet time on a daily and consistent basis and take the necessary steps to correct ourselves and make amends, only then we can take ourselves to another level. As we continue to pour in positive thoughts and do positive things to make our lives better, our inner soul begins to cleanse and we begin to purify ourselves. However, care must be taken not to repeat these mistakes again in the future. Whenever we have a thought, we should act upon it.

Some of the participants shared their thoughts after the quiet time as follows:

- "I realised that I was wearing a mask in the past. I had to present myself as a different person in front of different people. I realised that this was wrong and I stopped doing it."
- "I have been given a very good and expensive education and my parents have fulfilled all of my wants. I am off to work in the USA. I ask myself- have I been selfish in having all these things in my life? Couldn't I have settled for a normal education and worked in India?"
- "I have an ego issue with my college professor and my friends. I shall make amends by mailing across a letter of apology to him."
- "I realised that I am a very arrogant person and I get angry very often. I am also very dishonest. My soul is not pure and I feel ashamed interacting with myself. I am going to stop getting angry."
- "I am not confident to speak to my parents with complete honesty."

A participant realised that he was very selfish and materialistic and that he spent less time with his parents. He decided to change himself.

These exercises made the participants look deeper and embrace their inner demons. The participants showed their maturity and deep understanding of the exercises in the morning sessions. Literally all of the them were on the same page.

4th June is celebrated as a Khadi day in the conference. Khadi is a term for hand-spun and hand-woven cloth from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan primarily made out of cotton. In India, Khadi is not just a cloth, it is a whole movement started by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The Khadi movement promoted an ideology, an idea that Indians could be self-reliant on cotton and be free from the high priced goods and clothes which the British were selling to them. Khadi is also a symbol of national integration and

patriotism. Khadi connects all of us at a deeper level as Indians and we hoist the tri-colour on 4th June terming it as "Khadi Day". We pay tribute to all the freedom fighters and armed forces personal who have fought for our independence and given this generation a free and wonderful country to live in. We are reminded that we have a duty towards our country and that we must not forget our identity as Indians.

A session in the evening called India I care reverberated the feeling of caring for India. Many participants understood that as the youth they had a big contribution to make towards making India a better country. It was a good sign to see a lot of participants taking up the commitment slips and making small commitments and putting them in the deposit box. They committed themselves to act with integrity and set an example to the people outside by living with high standards and moral standards.

5th June is World environment day and also the day we have esteemed speakers address the participants. We had the pleasure to invite two distinguished personalities to Asia Plateau. The theme of this session is called "The Power of one."

Dr Vasusha Prakash

Dr Vasudha Prakash is the founder and director of V-Excel educational trust, an NGO in Chennai. A former professor of Rutgers University, New Jersey, she possess a Doctorate degree in special education and has established an NGO to promote educational activities in India focusing on children with special needs. She returned to India in 2001 to start this NGO and help children with special needs.

She also provides counselling services to parents of children with special needs. She has also created awareness creation programs by producing documentaries and other media related projects.

She spoke on the behaviour of special children and elaborated on their psychology. She also spoke to the participants about our psychology with emphasis on how our brain works. The participants had an understanding of how the brain functions when we make decisions.

Dr Vasudha Prakash also urged the participants not to over think and over-analyse, but rather chase their dreams and not let external factors and psychological barriers stop them from achieving their goals.

Her session was very well received by the participants and many of them had a lot of questions for her.

Ravi Kalra

Ravi Kalra is a former international level Taekwondo instructor. He is the founder of "The Earth Saviour's Foundation. Before he founded The Earth Saviours Foundation, he grew up inspired by his father who served as a Delhi Police Inspector. His tough, commando attitude helped shape Ravi Kalra's life and was one of the primary reasons that he began training in Taekwondo martial arts. After many years of gruelling training, he has travelled to 42 different countries coaching various Taekwondo teams around the world. However, he felt unfulfilled with all the luxuries around and found his calling in helping the needy. He is a self-proclaimed Karma Yogi and has dedicated his life to improve the lives of destitute children, abandoned senior citizens, victimized women and mentally disabled people.

He is also an active environmentalist and has done a lot of work regarding environment protection in India.

He spoke about his work and what his NGO and his group of volunteers have been doing to improve lives of all those around us. He spoke about "No honking day"- an event

which he organises in Delhi to create awareness about not honking, the importance of electric cremation and saving the Gwal Pahari forest cover in Gurgaon. He also went on to highlight the work his NGO carries out. The Earth Saviour's Foundation carries out the task of rescuing abandoned mother cows, rescuing abandoned senior citizens, providing free education and meals for underprivileged children. His NGO has also cremated over three thousand abandoned corpses. He also showed the participants images of the harsh reality outside and what he has to deal with on a daily basis. Even though the images shown were disturbing, they mirrored the truth of what is happening in our country.

He had a healthy question and answer session with the participants after his session.



Dr Vasudha Prakash and Ravi Kalra addressing the participants

Dr Rajmohan Gandhi

Dr Rajmohan Gandhi (born 1935) is a biographer and grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and a research professor at the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA. He is also a Scholar in residence at Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar.

He has been with Initiatives of Change (formerly known as Moral Re-Armament) from 1956 and has been engaged for half a century in efforts for trust-building, reconciliation and democracy and in battles against corruption and inequalities.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, he played a leading role in establishing Asia Plateau, the conference centre of Initiatives of Change in Panchgani, in the mountains of western India.

He is a proficient author and has authored many books. His latest book is titled "Punjab"- which is an unprecedented historical account of undivided Punjab, from the death of Aurangzeb to its partition.

He recently contested the 2014 general election from the East Delhi constituency under the Aam Aadmi Party and lost.

With Bhisham Mansukhani as the mediator, an interactive session was held with Rajmohan Gandhi. He spoke about his latest book on Punjab-its history and partition, his experience while campaigning for the Aam Aadmi party and what could the government do to make India a better country. His session was crisp and it was a very good interactive session where the participants asked various questions and he answered all of them patiently.



Dr Rajmohan Gandhi (right) seated with Bhisham Mansukhani interacts with the participants

Family is the first connection that you forge when you enter this world. And the connection never breaks. The family is always there for you and they support you during difficult times. A child after being born forms a lifetime bond of love with its mother. Thus, the emotion of love starts from the mother and spreads around the family, thereby, an atmosphere of love is created in the household. As we grow we tend to get divided with some of our family members, we develop an ego which prevents us from taking the steps to build bridges and rekindle distant relationships. Yes, we do have our fights and arguments with our family members. But it is very important to forgive them if they have wronged you and apologise to them if you have hurt them in a bad manner. Our ego has stopped us from taking the corrective steps to bridge the gap.

During the conference we take time out to think about our family and what we can do to better our relationships with them. Many participants opened up about their inner feelings and emotions that they harboured in their hearts towards their family.

The first sharing created a ripple effect in the auditorium and all the participants felt connected at the same level. Each sharing was a different story and many participants had apologies to make, people to forgive and bridges to build. They also realised how much they miss a family member who had passed away recently. All the participants realised that whatever their parents have done- good or bad have always been for their benefit.

Some participants also spoke about their distant relationship with their siblings. The lunch in silence carried the impact of the session towards the afternoon and many participants made calls to their families asking for forgiveness and apologising for their behaviour. They also spoke to people with whom they were far apart.

Many tears were shed and many smiled at the realization of what went wrong. The connection stayed till the end of the day.

Many of us are clueless about the kind of life that we want to have. Some of us just tend to live without celebrating it or achieving anything worthwhile. Hence, it is very important to set goals that will guide us to where we want to get from where we currently are.

An important session focused on various aspects of our lives such as career, family, wealth, hobbies, health and other things. If one wants to achieve big goals, then she/he will have to set small goals, and also change her/his daily routine and habits in order to achieve them. Discipline and consistent action is the key in achieving goals and also living a great life. Having a hobby refreshes the mind and helps us to express our creative side. Creating wealth is also an important aspect in our life. With wealth, one can live the life she/ he has dreamed of and she/he will also be in a position to help the society. Having peak health is joy and one must constantly maintain her/his health in the long run. A healthy mind and body can help us accomplish wonders.

Many participants wrote down their road map in this session and also wrote down their goals under various aspects of their life. They had more clarity about the actions that they will have to take in order to achieve their goals.

The highlight of this session was when a participant came up to share how , after being a part of the same session in the Nagpur conference, decided to analyse his life and work hard to join the National Defence Academy. He later achieved this goal and is now a focused individual who is very clear about where he is going and what he is going to do with his life. He credits this session for his achievement.

Another important session focused on vices and other negative traits. Many of us have a lot of negative traits inside us that prevents us from shining in this world. These negative traits corrupt our souls and prevent us from expressing our best selves. During the quiet time, the participants reflected on their negative traits and vices. They also thought about the action that they were going to take in order to remove them from their system.

The participants were also exposed to Pete Sampras's method of "defeating the moment". Anger is also a thing which each one of us will have to work on. The lesser the vices we have we begin to grow as human beings. The more vices and negative traits we have, the more our ego grows and we tend to think negatively. One must also work on removing other negative attributes and behaviour they have as it will destroy them in the long run. We must aim to shine in this world and we must shine from inside first.

While the sessions of the conference carry lessons and other messages, many exercises have also played a major role in helping the participants learn and understand the concepts that were taught to them.

As soon as the participants enrolled for the conference, they were put into eight different groups. Each group comprised a good mixture of refreshers and first time participants. Technology has certainly taken over the world and has been able to deliver things quickly and smoothly. Before the internet existed, there was a joy in writing handwritten letters and postcards to our loved ones who were living away from us. The anticipation of receiving a letter always created a flutter of emotions and one looked forward to the next letter. Gone are the days when one would write letters, send telegraphs and postcards. Today, thanks to the social network, keeping in touch has reduced to only tagging other people in pictures and statuses and sending and receiving short text messages with a different form of English language all together.

The participants were given postcards to send back to their families and they wrote with happiness and joy to their families. The participants were also asked to write a letter to themselves which they would receive within the next six months. The objective of this

exercise was to communicate with one's inner self and getting to know ourselves much better. All the participants felt happy on writing the postcards and the letters to themselves. The other purpose of this exercise was also to make the participants write more

Another session that tested the participants was the session where the participants had to write down one positive commitment that they would take up as soon as they left the gates of Asia plateau. The participants have experienced change at a deeper level here and it is important that they commit themselves to change as they leave the plateau. A record of some of the commitments can be seen in Annexure II of this report.

While all of the participants made a positive commitment to change, it was important that they remove the negative qualities out of their system. An exercise was given to all the participants where they had to write down certain negative qualities and throw them into a fire specially made for them. Many participants felt good and light inside as they watched their negative qualities burn away for good.

The evenings at Asia Plateau were a little light, compared to the informative and heavy sessions of the day. The first evening of the conference witnessed an ice breaker. The participants shed all inhibitions and gelled along with everyone like a glove fitting into a hand. The ice breaking activities also sparked the first hint of friendship and comradery. Another evening was spent on a group skit where each group had to enact a skit on their group name. This task brought the participants closer and they worked as a team to put on a good show.

In order to address the problem of the addiction of social media and technology in our daily lives, a play was enacted by a troupe from Mumbai. The title of this play was "Machine Abuse".

The play was very entertaining for the participants and it carried a strong message. The participants took the play seriously and some of them made a vow to spend less time with their cell phones and more time with the people around them.

Another evening was spent on showing the participants a movie with a strong message. The movie shown was "Matrubhumi" and it was focused around the evil of female infanticide. This movie was very thought provoking and the message stayed in the minds of the participants.

This conference stresses a lot on the youth of our country. Therefore, it was necessary to understand the youth of our country in terms of their behaviour, thinking and habits. Therefore a survey was designed to generate this information from the participants. The survey dealt with literally everything that the current generation was into. The questions were designed in such a way that we understand their vices, behaviour, habits and approach towards life. A discussion was held on the survey and the data gave a clear picture of what a majority of the youth population do in certain situations. Many participants expressed their distress over certain results of some questions but realised that they have to be more responsible and should conduct themselves with dignity and grace at all times. Thoughts and ideas were exchanged in a healthy manner and the discussion was fruitful. The results of the survey can be found in Annexure I of the report.

Socrates once rightfully said- " The secret of change is to focus all if your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new." The participants learnt something new each day during the course of the conference. And a lot of them committed themselves to change and live by example in the outside world. However, it is human tendency to fall back on to our old habits. It takes will, determination and hard work to stay on the path of change. Change is hard at first, messy in the middle and beautiful in the end.

In order to remind the participants about their commitment, a pledge was shown to them. The pledge serves as a reminder that we have committed to a certain way of life and we should follow it no matter what. After reading the pledge, many participants took up the pledge and signed it. They promised not to let the fire within them die.

The conference concluded with a multi faith prayer that was conducted so that we all pray as one whole family. And the participants and the co-ordinating team prayed together for happiness, success, peace and love. May God guide all of us in this journey called life.

A wise man once said that success lies not in the destination, but in the journey. For once the journey is over, the mission is accomplished and there is a new journey to start. The journey with LMAD will always go on for the co-ordinators. They are on a continuous journey for growth, learning and connecting with the inner god that is within us. Every day is a new beginning and each day brings with it a challenge and new life lesson to be learnt. The coordinators committed themselves to this conference and put the conference before themselves. They came with no personal agenda and demonstrated exemplary behaviour and helped conduct a good conference where they inspired a lot of young people to change. The same momentum and attitude will be carried forward to the next conference which is the 21st Conference that will take place in the year 2015. They will always continue to "Make a Difference".



The co-ordinating team for the 20th LMAD National Youth conference.