



# Being Human

Discovering Our True Essence!

**REPORT ON JAIPUR WORKSHOP  
20 – 25 JANUARY 2010**





## BEING HUMAN – A REPORT ON THE JAIPUR WORKSHOPS

Amidst the color and glitter of the 5th Jaipur Literature Festival this year, 60 young people came together for 6 days, to share, learn and sensitize each other, as they explored different facets of Humanism. This was the launch of the BEING HUMAN workshops by the Tehelka Foundation - a not-for-profit NGO committed to youth empowerment for the past 5 years.

A clear economic and social divide ran through the group - half representing the elite of Jaipur, with students from prestigious high schools like the Maharani Gayathri Devi Girls' School, Maharaja Sawai Man Singh Vidyalaya and Step By Step High School.

The other 30 participants were from two NGOs - Digantar, working on the outskirts of Jaipur with Muslim girls who are first generation learners, and Doosra Dashak, an organization that focuses on the education and development of young people in the age group of 11-20 years, as a lever for larger social and economic development.

The mix of privileged children with the less fortunate was a deliberate choice for the workshop to stress on importance of Social Equity, even as we explored the core values of Human Dignity, Love and Respect.



The workshop began a day prior to the festival, on 20<sup>th</sup> January, to provide an uncluttered space for the participants to drop their inhibitions and embark on their discovery of each other and themselves. It kicked off with a morning of fun as theatre games and icebreakers opened up the group, to freely share their thoughts and compile a list of what they felt were the core values of BEING HUMAN. Compassion, openness and flexibility, self-belief, fearlessness and respect for every living being, headed the list.

Across the festival grounds placards on the theme of BEING HUMAN had been placed strategically, to provoke the visitors into engaging with the issue.



Using waste material like discarded cardboard boxes, old newspapers and greeting cards, the children designed 6 Response boxes, to collect written feedback from the visitors. It was an exciting afternoon on the first day, as the children broke up into random groups to paint, paste and create magical boxes for the respondents.



The next morning as they excitedly placed the boxes across the festival grounds, the students chatted with the visitors, coming back with different responses on humanism. Some went across to the Google Van parked in the grounds and worked in mixed groups, teaching the rural students about the ease of navigating through the Internet, and creating individual email identities for them.



The next five days were a mix of activities ranging from intense group work using the medium of theatre, improvisations and role-plays on different situations in the human experience, to individual meditations prompting self-reflection, to interacting with a diverse range of resource people who added new depth to their understanding of the theme.

Watching the Muslim girls from Digantar fiercely narrate their on going struggle with their families and community, seeking permission to continue with their studies beyond Class 8, was an eye opener for many present. Krishna Singh, a class XI student from Maharani Gayathri Devi Girls' School was very touched by their story. "I felt ashamed when I saw their zeal to study because people like us who get all these facilities easily don't appreciate it."



Most of the privileged students had assumed that these kinds of struggles have been a part of pre-independent India, and that today, there was more equality between the sexes. Receiving the truth of these young girls, connecting with their pain and anger, sensitized them to the plight of many other young girls in rural India, who could be spearheading similar struggles.

A range of sessions organized through the 6 days exposed the children to different facets of life. A morning was well spent with painter Bulbul Sharma, as she took them through a Nature Art workshop, in which the children mingled freely, creating a tapestry of vibrant pictures on a single canvas, with an amazing riot of color!



At the Theatre workshop that afternoon they worked with music and movement, learning songs from other groups, understanding the universality of this language. This experience expanded into sheer delight with the performance of SAMPAD - a South Asian group based in the UK, who were in Jaipur on an experimental project, with musicians and dancers from diverse disciplines. It was a treat to watch the dancers and musicians respond to each other's nuances and rhythms, creating a harmony that flowed seamlessly through the artistes.



We were ready to work on deeper core issues - of conflict, of resolution, of building consensus. Dilip Simeon, a firm believer in the Gandhian principle of non violence, shared his journey as young political activist, who committed to the Naxal cause in the early 70's because he believed in their ideology of fighting for the rights of the landless labour. And his subsequent disenchantment as he questioned the bloodshed and violence as a form of resolution, and whether instead, it did not perpetuate another cycle of mindless violence.

Chaitanya Tambi from Step by Step High school said "I thought the Naxals were bad people. After the interaction with Mr. Simeon I realized their fight is for a cause! That has changed my approach towards a lot of things."

In the context of today's fragmented world these are not easy questions, and the attempt was to open up the complexities of the issues involved, so that each participant engaged with the issue from the context of the greater good.

The debate was further enhanced through the presentation given by Ornit Shani and Frederik Gauteng from Jerusalem, on the Palestine Israel conflict. Through an effective role-play in which the students participated, they demonstrated the plight of the ordinary citizens, locked in a political conflict they seemed to be hapless victims of.

Is there a humane way to resolve these conflicts? How does one move into a space of open dialogue, even before one can even think of any form of Consensus?

No easy answers can be forthcoming.

With these questions uppermost in our minds, we relaxed into a deeper meditative space the next morning, where we tried to assimilate the experiences of the past 5 days into our core, accepting our selves completely, and then reaching out to our neighbors' with trust and belief. A couple of hours of meditation and deep reflection flowed into a theatre exercise of reaching out to a partner with love and trust, of easing the pain of another by lovingly opening out the knots and blocks in their physical being. Also learning to receive love and respect with the same ease, as one is comfortable with giving. "If there's anything better than being loved, it is loving!" said Krishna.



Refreshed after such a rejuvenating morning, they students enjoyed a session on Animal Welfare with Dr. Naveen Pandey who runs an NGO in Jaipur called "Help in Suffering". Compassion was to extend not only to another human being but to every living creature on this planet! The students exchanged ideas as to how they could help create a better environment for animals in Jaipur, and promised to remain connected with Dr. Pandey well after the workshop.

An unexpected treat that suddenly materialized for us was a one hour session with renowned Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, who shared his experiences on racial discrimination as a young student in London, and how it inspired him his writing "Telephone Conversation". Speaking about the need to work towards a more equitable society, Wole said that most countries have replaced colonial rule with a form of "internal colonialism", within which a powerful and rich ruling class now dominate the less fortunate.

It was now time to wind down...the last morning was one of feedback, of poetry, singing, games...and sharing....

The children had broken out of their comfort spaces of only mixing with those from a similar background. Instead they had reached out across social and economic divides to connect with a completely different reality, and relate it to their own. "I got to make friends with children from NGO's, from other schools as well as the theatre artists from England. Thanks to the workshop, we became comfortable with each other" said Madhu Singh from Maharani Gayatri Devi Girls' school. The voice of the girls from Digantar and their passion for education, resonated deep with all of them, and if any community action is to be taken in future, the students from the workshop would be articulate supporters of their fight.



*Excerpts from their writings:*

“What are the qualities of a good human being?

Honesty...Respect...

Integrity...Discipline...

Love...Compassion...

Is this enough???

NO I don't think so!” writes Bhawna from Maharani Gayatri Devi girls' school.

Maseena Khan from Digantar in her poem “Bhedbhav” writes -

“Hamara samaj karta ladka ladki mein bhedbhav kyun?

Ladke ko B.A karatey, ladki ko panchvi kyun??”

(Translation: why does our society discriminate between a girl and a boy? Why is the boy allowed to study for a college degree, while a girl is only educated upto Class 5?)

Rekha from Doosra Darshak says “We were all compete strangers when we came here! But over the past few days we've all become friends and I don't feel strange anymore.”

“Ek pankhudi lekar uski khushboo bhari kashish ko to dekh,

Jab ped katey to uske dard ko mehsoos karke to dekh!

Aye manav tu itna swarthy na ban,

Tu ek baar prakriti ka dost ban kar to dekh!”

(Translation: As one inhales the fragrance of a petal, is one also aware of the pain of a tree as it is being cut? O Man, don't be so caught up in your own selfishness, try befriending Nature for a change!)

Naziya, Digantar, in her poem titled “Aye Manav tu itna Swarthy na ban”

“What is being human?

Is it being over confident?

Or doing things you resent?

No it is not!”

say the girls from MGD girls' school.

Sanyukta from Step by Step high school sums up with:

“It is better to die,

Than to see people cry!

If everything goes on as it is, I will surely run!

Because I desperately want to be Human!”



