



Building trust across the world's divides

Initiatives of Change

Asia Plateau

Centre for Initiatives of Change (IofC)

Asia Plateau, IofC's international centre in Asia, belongs to Moral Re-Armament (MRA), India now known as Initiatives of Change (IofC). The famed 'Table Land' of Panchgani at an altitude of 1300 meters (4,200 ft.) in the Western Ghats of the peninsula, forms a majestic backdrop to the 68-acre campus dominated by natural greenery. The aim of the centre is to equip people with the character and clarity, through honest personal transformation, to address the problems and crises the world faces.



Background and History

Science, technology and modern economic practices have brought the world and our country progress, which is measured as GDP. We have generated enough wealth to feed, clothe, educate and meet the needs of almost everyone in the world. Governments have implemented schemes and plans to eliminate deprivation and suffering; many dedicated NGOs and corporates through CSR programmes are making substantial contributions. Yet progress has meant that largely the already fortunate get a seemingly unfair share of its fruits; the suffering of the weak continues. 'Asia Plateau', as an MRA-lofC centre, seeks to host, in an enabling environment, get-togethers of people who are single-minded in their determination to correct this anomaly.

The programmes also address the causes of violence, wars and terrorism that are tearing the world apart.

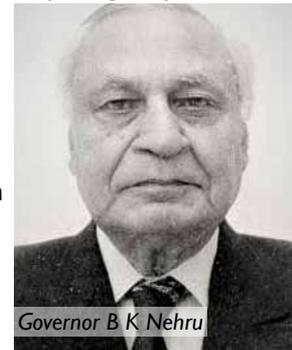
Inspired by the vision of a New India and a New World of care and compassion to cure the root causes of hate, fear and greed, thousands of people sacrificed and contributed to create Asia Plateau in the late '60s. A widow giving half the capital left by her husband, an Assamese farmer saving 25 paise each day and sending it, schoolchildren skipping a meal to give the saved money and a young boy taking to shoe-polishing to collect money for the construction are but a few examples. A reputed Australian architect designed and supervised the construction without charging a fee; many engineers worked without salary and so on.

Glimpses of what could happen through Asia Plateau were seen even at the inauguration of the very first building Valley View in 1968. Two farmer brothers from a nearby village who were divided for years mended their relationship.

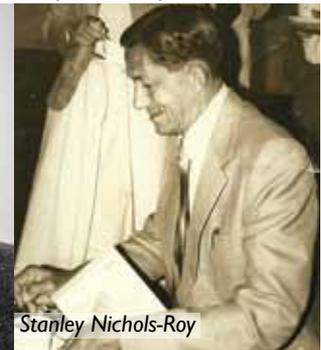


Reconciled Yadav brothers, Marutirao & Narayanrao meet a prominent leader

Stanley Nichols-Roy, an influential political leader from what is now Meghalaya, the hill state in the North East of India, came with his church choir. His party had been agitating for a state separate from Assam. Violent uprising was a real possibility. Nichols-Roy's visit to Asia Plateau resulted in him admitting to his family his personal wrongdoings and making amends. Next was his reconciliation with the then Assam Chief Minister B P Chaliha, leading to the restarting of the stalled negotiations, which concluded with a unique solution agreed to by both sides. Eventually Meghalaya was formed peacefully. Governor B K Nehru commented, "Seldom has such a far reaching constitutional change been brought about with so much goodwill and understanding on all sides".



Governor B K Nehru



Stanley Nichols-Roy

As the second residential building Rock View became ready for use in 1969, the place thronged with young and old from all over the country and from abroad, eager to participate in the programmes of Moral Re-Armament (MRA). The idea of changing oneself and taking the change to others to make a difference in the society began to spread rapidly through stage plays, musicals, songs and skits produced at the centre by enthusiastic young men and women. Money for the construction began to come in as these dedicated youth volunteers travelled round the country with their productions, spreading the ideas.

When the main building opened in 1973, people who mattered began to notice what was happening in this hill town and started visiting the centre. They liked what they experienced and offered support. Shashi Patel who owned and ran a famous film-processing unit in Mumbai was one such who made peace with his union leaders. Frederic Philips, then global head of Philips, inaugurated the main building and donated the audio-visual equipment and the light fittings for the entire building. S L Kirloskar landed his private airplane on the tableland to visit the centre and donated the generating set for power backup.

The Central Philosophy

If we want to see problems solved in the world, people will need to become different. MRA-lofC encourages each one to take an honest look at oneself and start with oneself the change that is needed in the society. Reflecting in silence or listening to the Inner Voice is at the centre of all MRA-lofC activities and considerations. This practice helps to reach conclusions and agreements based on 'what is right' rather than 'who is right'. The open spaces and natural surroundings, the calm and soothing atmosphere, the ambience within the buildings, the caring and non-threatening fellowship offered by all provide for calm, quiet and honest reflection. However, the practice is possible even when participants return to their regular environment when they make dedicated time and effort for it. Weighing one's thoughts, decisions and actions against the absolute moral standards of Purity, Honesty, Unselfishness and Love helps to have motives clarified.



Asia Plateau - Nature Dominates



Outreach into Baramati town



Arun Maira, former Planning Commission member at CIB Conference

Development of Activities

Since 1968, programmes are conducted to address societal needs through change in individuals of all occupations. The centre seeks to develop leaders of character in every area and from every background who have found in their lives freedom from anger/hate, greed, selfishness, lust and other traits that scuttle their own happiness and bring harm to society. This is attempted not through imparting knowledge of ethics or right and wrong but by leading people to their own 'Inner Self', to listen to what the Mahatma referred to as the 'Still Small Voice Within', which can guide anyone who cares to listen to it and obey its promptings. This is inspired and encouraged through sharing of experiences of a host of people who have experimented with these ideas. The four absolute moral standards mentioned above serve as measuring tools for the thoughts and actions to keep one on track towards

a goal of personal freedom and the welfare of the larger population. Many who have applied and practiced these ideas in taking proactive initiatives at work or outside have seen powerful positive transformation, often in unexpected ways, in many situations.

After students, youth and educational institutes, the section of society that responded to the programmes of Asia Plateau was Business. At a time when there was widespread industrial unrest and severe confrontation between management and unions, many industries found that at Asia Plateau, credible trust building between the conflicting sides was being achieved. They started sending their employees to the centre. As a result, focused programmes were developed and delivered to the men and women of industry and business. These came to be known as, "Creative Leadership for Industry and National Development" which is the origin of the present day popular programmes for



Indian Administrative Service Officers

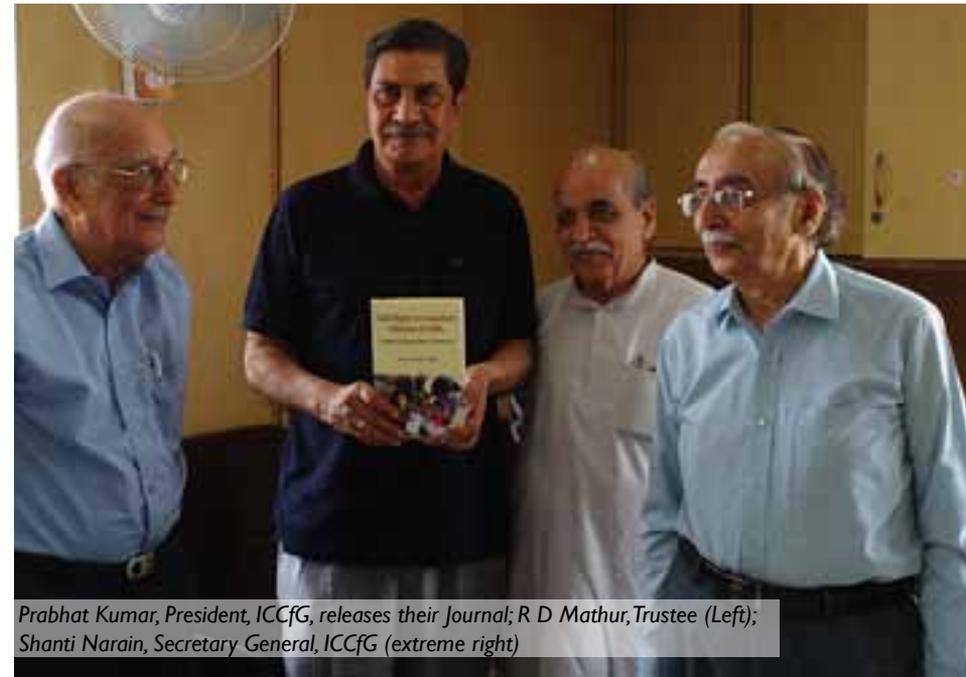
Nichols-Roy and his colleagues leading to the formation of Meghalaya had interested people from mainstream politics and bureaucracy. Yet, no significant movement took place in these fields until early 2000 when a very senior officer who had just retired as Governor of a state and was earlier the Cabinet Secretary came to Asia Plateau with another who was a Railway Board member. They could visualise the change that could come to the country through ethical and good governance and the role Asia Plateau could play.

They did not lose any time in gathering their eminent colleagues to set up a dedicated institution for the purpose, 'Initiatives of Change Centre for Governance' (ICCFG) as an independent body. ICCfG enjoys the trust and confidence of many government departments and PSUs who send executives and other employees for training by ICCfG and lofC at Asia Plateau and other venues.

different levels of business. Programmes with special focus on education, youth, families etc. also emerged as these groups showed keen interest in imbibing and spreading the ideas and spirit of MRA-lofC to bring about positive change in people and situations in their areas of involvement. For over four decades, people connected with Asia Plateau have accumulated invaluable experience through conducting an increasing number of programmes each year. Their learning is still in progress!

Teams of interns and fulltime volunteers also travelled to other far-flung parts of the country, from the Southern states to the North East of India, to interact with groups to find answers to difficult situations.

A significant development in 2006 was the formation of a sister institution to promote good governance. The change that came to



Prabhat Kumar, President, ICCfG, releases their Journal; R D Mathur, Trustee (Left); Shanti Narain, Secretary General, ICCfG (extreme right)



Educators at ETST program



Niketu & Christine Iralu of Nagaland with Sarla Kapadia



Effective Living and Leadership Programme

Programmes

Facilitators, interns, volunteers and others at Asia Plateau try to create an atmosphere favourable for relaxed, unhurried reflection on important deeper issues in life –at work, in the family and society. The programmes are designed to build a strong national character and to understand and address the needs of the world. Regular workshops and seminars like those listed below are drawing an increasing number of people from around the country:

Ethics in Public Governance for government officers of All India Service – IAS, IPS, Indian Railways, Public Undertakings etc. are held in collaboration with ICCfG. Several state Govt. and other public agencies also ask for these programmes for their officers

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

Caux Initiatives of Business (CIB) Biennial conference in collaboration with lofC, Japan

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

Education Today Society Tomorrow (ETST) workshops for educators

Family programmes over some weekends in addition to the longer annual family ELL

Let's Make a Difference (LMAD) from 1 to 8 June every year for youth of 18 to 25 from all backgrounds

Lead for Change (LfC) targeted at young (20 to 35) executives and professionals while it is also open to other young people

Programme for Indian Army's Institute of National Integration (INI) of religious teachers and other personnel.

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



Asia Plateau Internship Programme (APIP)

APIP is a five-month international, unpaid internship programme aimed at developing future leaders, conducted twice a year. It offers a variety of exposure and experience to the interns who come from many parts of the world. They assist in the practical running of certain aspects of the centre along with delegates, participate in some programmes and learn to take leadership. Along the way, they learn to sing the MRA-lofC songs at the meetings, perform skits and relate their experiences at workshops. They also take part in organising international conferences, if one takes place during their internship.

They learn about India as a country, its people and its culture. An outreach programme to some other part of the country and visits to nearby villages completes the experience. There are also structured workshops and classes when they hear and interact with accomplished experts and achievers. Current affairs and understanding the world as it is, the forces that shape society help them as leaders to make a difference in bringing peace and stability to their part of the world and beyond.

Their 5-month life together on the campus is under the guidance and mentorship of seniors. They have opportunities to develop the ability to understand, adjust and help each other in a multi-faith and multi-cultural community and learn tolerance and acceptance. There is particular attention given to each intern's 'Inner Journey' and 'Inner Growth' through the practice of regular Quiet Time reflection, 'inner listening' and mentoring.



Interns from India, S. Korea, Japan, Columbia and Spain

Accommodation and Facilities

The centre has two major residential buildings and a main complex. There is modern, clean and comfortable accommodation in the two residential blocks, Valley View and Rock View, for over 150 participants. During youth occasions, 130 more beds can be added with the fold-away bunk beds. Valley View also has the reception, administration offices and a cyber café with an outdoor Wi-Fi area attached to it. Rock View also houses a library and underground rainwater storage tanks.

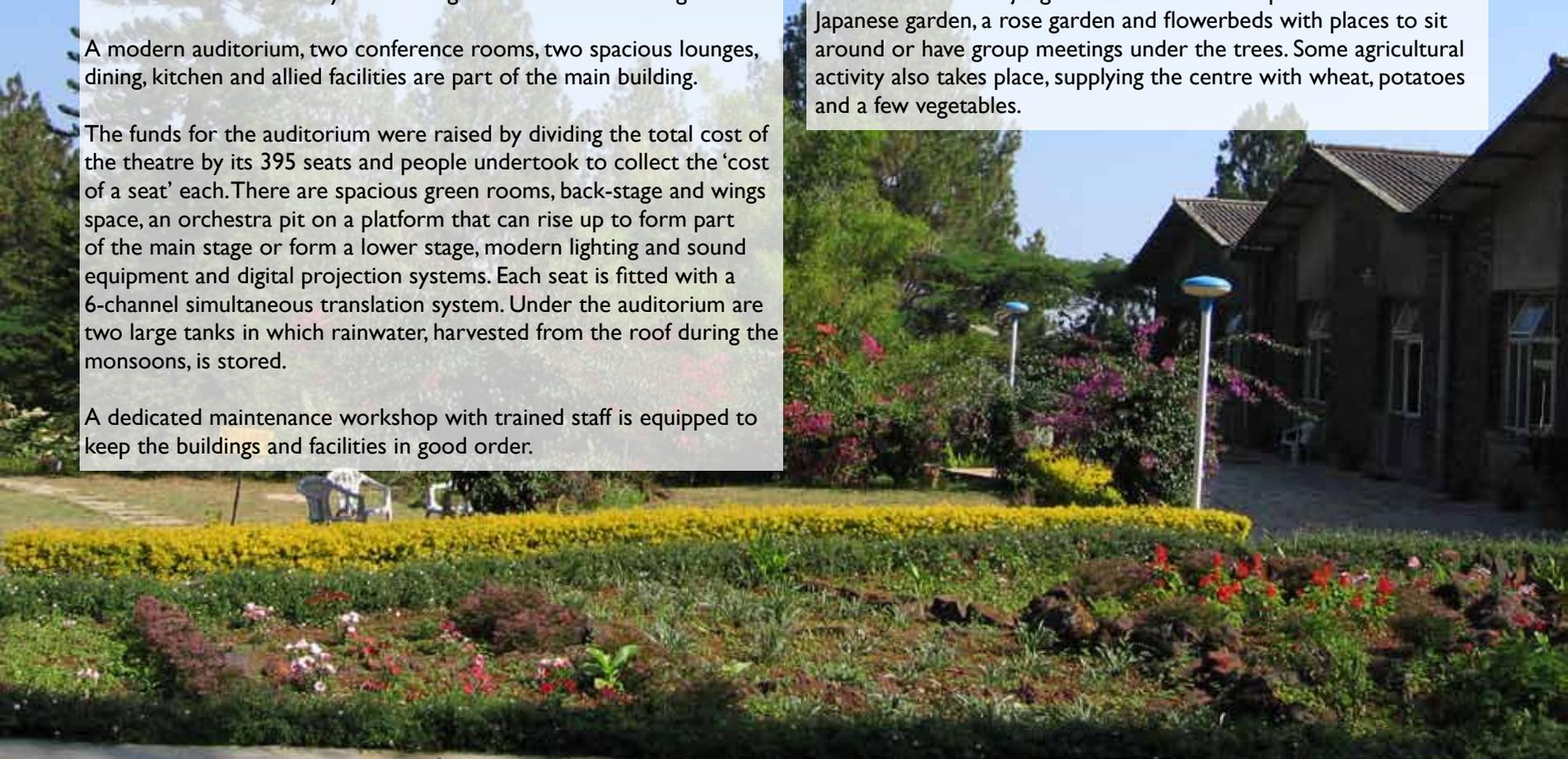
A modern auditorium, two conference rooms, two spacious lounges, dining, kitchen and allied facilities are part of the main building.

The funds for the auditorium were raised by dividing the total cost of the theatre by its 395 seats and people undertook to collect the 'cost of a seat' each. There are spacious green rooms, back-stage and wings space, an orchestra pit on a platform that can rise up to form part of the main stage or form a lower stage, modern lighting and sound equipment and digital projection systems. Each seat is fitted with a 6-channel simultaneous translation system. Under the auditorium are two large tanks in which rainwater, harvested from the roof during the monsoons, is stored.

A dedicated maintenance workshop with trained staff is equipped to keep the buildings and facilities in good order.

The Gardens

At Asia Plateau, nature dominates. The grounds on which it stands had just one tree in the beginning, which still stands. With a little tree-planting, but mainly by letting nature have its way by stopping grazing and hillside-burning (a traditional practice called 'vanava' in the region) a thick forest has materialised on the hillside behind the buildings in the last 40 odd years. Over eighty varieties of birds have returned and some jungle animals. The landscaped areas include a Japanese garden, a rose garden and flowerbeds with places to sit around or have group meetings under the trees. Some agricultural activity also takes place, supplying the centre with wheat, potatoes and a few vegetables.





School Handwashing Programme

Grampari

On the Campus of Asia Plateau is Grampari, Grameen va Pariyaavaran Kendra, Rural and Ecology Centre, whose aim is to bring the ideas of lofC to rural India through a robust rural development programme. Grampari works in different areas of rural development: Developing low cost sustainable solutions to meet the specific needs of a particular village.

GAV (Grampari Adopted Villages)

EXAMPLE: Village of Vivar –facing acute drinking water problems with paucity of water supply as well as water contamination through animal faeces, pesticides from fields and ash from a nearby burial ground. Grampari’s WATERSHED programme built a covered spring box, which not only protected the spring but also increased the quantity and quality of water. Believing in behavioural change, Grampari motivated the warring factions in the village to come together to work voluntarily to build their spring box. Work was also done on water harvesting methods and the protection of their aquifers.

Under its GOVERNANCE programme, Grampari has conducted training to motivate women and youth to get involved in the decision-

making processes through Gramsabhas. The village has put in place a waste disposal system where the degradable and non-degradable waste is separated and disposed of in a systematic way. The drains are rebuilt and covered, resulting in hygienic surroundings and wider roads.

The Grampari YOUTH programmes have trained youth in livelihood options like mobile repair, sewing and organic farming. Some of these youth have been encouraged to have Quiet Time, inspiring them to make corrections in their lives and taking life-changing and humbling decisions. For example, ‘I will not spend time watching pornography on mobiles’; ‘I will not tease girls’.

They are now united under the name Grampari Yuva Manch to help in village development. They have repaired leaking taps, cleaned up the village, put out forest fires and helped manage waste disposal. A well-wisher has donated them a library. Women in the village have established a fund through which they save money and lend it to anyone who is in need, charging a small interest.

The Farm at Grampari has demonstration plots for learning organic and sustainable farming. Several workshops to train farmers in sustainable farming are held. Grampari is also establishing an indigenous seeds bank. School are encouraged to develop plots to grow vegetables organically.

There are three more villages under the GAV programme where similar work by Grampari is facilitating ALL round village development.

The Hand Washing with Soap programme has reached 68 Schools in Satara district, resulting in reduced absenteeism, indicating improved health. Added to this is the 'washing your hearts' programme, which motivates children to have 'Quiet Time' to listen to the Inner Voice. Children spontaneously make up after fights amongst them, admit telling lies and admit not doing work they were asked to do. They pledge to right these wrongs.

Find out more about Grampari on: <http://grampari.org>



Villagers offer 'Shram Daan' to build a spring box.



Reaching Asia Plateau

Panchgani is 100 km from Pune, the nearest airport. Satara is the nearest Rail station. Comfortable buses from Mumbai and Pune ply daily and taxis are available. For any assistance, please contact us on any of the below mentioned details.

Generally, a three-month calendar of the centre can be found on our website. To participate in any of the centre's programmes, one may contact the Programmes Coordinator or the General Manager: programs@in.iofc.org and gm@in.iofc.org



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