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# **They Dared to Change**

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**A Moral Re-Armament Publication**

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## Introduction

Narrated in this booklet are real-life stories of ordinary men and women who, by simple steps of change in their own outlook and behaviour, have lit lamps of hope instead of continuing to curse the darkness. They have discovered that change begins when people start to listen to each other and to the still small voice within – and to face up to where they are wrong.

Evidence is also presented herein of the ripple effect of personal change – in homes, societies, villages and industries.

Many may still be content with a long wait for the system to change or for a Superman to come to their rescue. But these stories, it is hoped, will inspire others to make the experiment themselves and to become instruments of social, economic, national and international change.

# 1 The Load of Books



Wanlura Diengdoh from Shillong, Meghalaya came to Panchgani in 1986; here he learnt to listen to that still small voice which speaks in every human heart. It became very clear to him that corruption in public life would end only if budding politicians like himself owned up about their mistakes and put things right. He recalled how he had regularly been "borrowing" books from the State Central Library for many years and had been piling them up at home. He decided to return the books to the library.

However, when he went back home, his courage failed him. Doubts assailed him. What would his opponents say? How would his partymen react? His neighbours? Friends? Then he landed up in Panchgani for another conference in January 1987. He realised that he could no longer postpone obeying the direction of the inner voice. From Asia Plateau, he wrote a letter of apology to the librarian and promised that the books would be returned.

On returning home in April 1987, one day he hired a taxi, and with two other friends carried two cartons of books from his home to the library. There were 65

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*\*\*Wanlura Diengdoh is a well-known leader of the National Student's Union of India in Meghalaya. He is a graduate in Commerce and is now studying Law.*

books in all. There was a look of utter amazement and disbelief in the eyes of the librarian when Wanlura walked in and handed over the books. He said that he had never had such an experience in his life. Deeply moved, he waived aside the fine and said that the library would be the richer by Wanlura's action.



## 2 And Today We Work Together



Shailendra Mahato, an Adivasi leader from Dorkasai Village in Southern Bihar says :

“When I went to the city for higher studies, people there behaved very badly towards me. I hated them. I stopped studying and joined a political group. I organised meetings for expressing a policy of hate towards these people. I led gatherings which went on violent rampages against those who settled on our land and burnt our houses. The violence not only affected my group but also my village and family.”

### **Where he needed to change**

In 1982, Shailendra heard of the four absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love at an MRA Seminar in Jamshedpur. He also heard stories of personal change. He found nothing new in these standards, nor did he think he needed to change because he was satisfied that he was already providing unselfish leadership to the exploited class. But when he experimented with listening to the inner voice, he realised that he needed to change. He gave no time to his wife, nor did he give any importance to what she said, as a result of which there was perpetual tension at home. His thought was to apologise to his wife. On coming home, he told his

wife about Moral Re-Armament and the inner voice. He apologised to her for his behaviour. His wife did not believe him and said, "First you change yourself, then change me."

### **Peace restored at home**

Shailendra's wife exploited his apology and told him that she would accept it only if they moved into a separate house of their own. The wife did not want to live with her mother-in-law. The squabbling increased. The result was that his mother, brother and their families began to live in another place. For Shailendra this was a trying period. He couldn't see a way out. Neighbours suggested, "A wife is like a drum, you have to beat her to put her in her place." But Shailendra didn't consider this right. In such a difficult situation, God showed him the way.

They had a son. Shailendra told his wife, "We can live separately only if we put our boy into an orphanage." His wife was astounded. With tears in her eyes, she said, "He is our own blood. How can you even think of sending him to an orphanage? How can we live without him?" Shailendra replied, "If you cannot part with your child, what right do you have to separate me from my mother?" This went deep into her heart. She accepted her mistake and apologised to the members of the family. Now they all live together and peace has been restored.

### **Group rivalry resolved**

There were two political groups in Dorkasai village, one led by Shailendra and the other by Thakurdas Mahato. They were at daggers drawn. If one tried to do something for the development of the village, the other would pull him down. The result was that all development work came to a standstill. In a time of quiet, it dawned on Shailendra that the mutual

animosity between the two groups was blocking the advancement of the village. He had to extend a hand of friendship towards Thakurdas for the sake of the prosperity of the village.

For many days Shailendra was in a dilemma. How could he make friends with someone with whom he had never spoken without abusive language? Prodded by MRA friends from Jamshedpur, Shailendra picked up courage and went to Thakurdas' house. He was surprised when Thakurdas welcomed him with open arms. Shailendra told him about the inspiration he had received from his inner voice and sought to be forgiven for his wrong attitude. Thakurdas weighed what he had heard. In Shailendra's own words, "Today, we work together".

### **A pond for fish and farming**

After a few years, Shailendra's financial condition weakened and he couldn't afford to send his son to a good school. He toyed with the idea of taking up a job outside, but friends suggested that to earn more money he could very well arrange irrigation for his fields, to raise their productivity. A friend advanced one thousand rupees for digging a small pond. In the very first year, eleven hundred rupees were earned from the sale of fish. After a year, with help from TELCO\* and friends, the reservoir was made bigger. It now serves to irrigate not only his fields but also those of the neighbouring farmers.

### **Closure averted**

The Village Development Centre run by TELCO in Jamshedpur had 233 temporary employees who were organised under a strong union. In support of its charter of demands, including that of regularisation of temporary workers, the union had organised a

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\*TELCO – Tata Engineering & Locomotive Co. Ltd.



12 day strike. The dispute escalated to such a pitch that the management refused to talk to the union. A tripartite meeting with the government officials was held. An assurance was given of due consideration to their demands. However, when the verdict was given after a month, the union did not accept it. The strike was resumed. The management took the help of the police and declared that disciplinary action would be taken against those employees who did not report for work.

In his time of quiet, Shailendra had the thought that he should come to the help of the union. He talked to union leaders and suggested that the agitation be kept peaceful. He was the first to sit in a hunger strike with them. He wanted a dialogue between the management and the union secretary and for this battled hard without success. The situation became grim. After two months, 28 persons were dismissed. In retaliation the Union put a lock on the Village Development Centre. Politics entered; violence erupted.

The management thought of closing down the Centre indefinitely. The prospect of 205 men losing their jobs and village development work stopping spurred Shailendra to act. He picked up courage to meet Ramdas, the leader of the political party. Ramdas used to look upon Shailendra as an agent of the management. He asked Shailendra "What do you want?" Shailendra replied, "I want to talk about 'what is right, not who is right'. The management dismissed 28 men; you will do so to the remaining 205. Will you become a big social worker by having the Village Development Centre closed down?" One of Ramdas' colleagues said, "Shailendra is right. We must talk to the management to ensure that the Centre is not wound up." The negotiations started. After about a

month, a settlement was arrived at and the Centre started to function afresh.

Shailendra's vision is of a cottage near the pond in his 5 acre farm. Here fellow farmers would meet regularly, think together and learn about modern ways of farming, so that they could live on their own lands self-reliantly and with self-respect.

He also believes that such individual changes can give a healthy turn to the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha\*\* which is essential for the future of his people and of the country.



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\*\*A political party

### 3 A Sinhala Reaches Out to Tamils



At Panchgani, in January '88, I participated in a conference titled 'Rekindling Hope'. Each day, I listened to what the participants had to say. I learnt of their struggles to apply the absolute standards of morality to their lives. I heard not simple tales of happy endings but of lives in the process of change. I saw how we are never alone in our struggles to become better people and to build a better world.

Three stories in particular remain etched in my memory. The first is Ranjit Singh's. He used to collect Rs.2000-3000 a month in bribes at the Delhi Corporation. Everyone did it, the bosses knew it, and work went on. Then Ranjit came across MRA. It challenged him to think what he could do for India and the world. Ranjit learnt about the four absolute moral standards and found himself lacking.

I thought I could picture Ranjit's dilemma. For if he stopped taking bribes, would not his family suffer from the sharp fall in his 'income'? But as it turned out this was not the problem. For whatever reason, Ranjit had started to drink and gamble heavily and so his family did not benefit at all from his unofficial

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*\* \* Jehan Perera, a graduate of Harvard Law School, is a young Sri Lankan writer and journalist. The above is an extract from his article in Colombo's 'Daily News'.*

income. But as soon as he applied absolute moral standards to his workplace and stopped taking bribes his desire to drink and gamble faded.

'I want a clean India and therefore I start with myself,' said O.P. Bagaria, an industrialist from tea-producing Assam. He took a stand by not paying a Rs.5,000 bribe to save Rs.400,000 worth of sub-quality metal produced by his outdated factory. As a result, the factory had to be closed down. But, as OP noted, had he paid the bribe this time, the factory would have survived to produce another round of sub-quality metal. Then once again he would have been confronted with the problem of paying a bribe. The cycle of dishonesty is a hard one to break. But OP had the courage to do so.

The third story is one in which I was involved. I had been asked to give a talk on Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. I briefly touched upon what I thought were its central themes. But for my main theme I decided to be honest about my struggle with the racism within me which I had kept hidden. I listened to my 'Inner Voice'.

No one likes to admit there is racism within him or her. We rationalise and try to find non-racist explanations for the positions we take. In my case, the rational part of me recognises that I must be a Sri Lankan before being a Sinhalese in order to find the common ground between the Sinhalese and Tamils. But my experience has shown me that in moments of crisis, before my mind can take control, I respond emotionally as a Sinhalese. Then the Sinhalese become 'us' while the Tamils and everyone else become 'they'. This split between the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan in me took its worst form just prior to and during the July 1983 riots. There were Tamils from Sri Lanka in the audience and I said to them I was sorry.

For how could I work for a united Sri Lanka until I myself was a Sri Lankan and not simply a Sinhalese? The next day J.S. Parthiban, a Tamil from Tamil Nadu, got up on the platform and said, 'Naturally, like every Tamil I feel very much about what is happening in Tamil Nadu about the problems in Sri Lanka. When I think about the problem in Sri Lanka I get very worked up. I get emotional. But I feel I have been very selfish because I have thought only of the Tamils there. Listening the other night I felt very ashamed of myself and I want to say sorry to the Sri Lankans over here'. He concluded his talk by saying, 'I want to work for a united Sri Lanka'.



## 4 Shaikh Renovates

Chand Shaikh works with an industry near Pune. He lives in a small village nearby, called Chikhali. He is a Muslim, born and brought up there and loves the place. A few years ago, his was the only Muslim family but now there are several of them. Meera Rege translates for him as he tells his story :

“Chikhali lies between Alandi of Sant Gnyaneshwar and Dehu, the birthplace of Sant Tukaram. So the people of our village are very religious. It is said that about 350 years ago when Sant Tukaram left for his heavenly abode, he gave his bells to them as his memory. The villagers had then built a temple but could not complete it because of lack of funds. So the temple lay there in a half ruined state.

“Since the temple was in such a state, people hardly came there. It was more a shelter for dogs, donkeys and cattle. I live about 15 feet from the temple. I could not stand the dirt and rubbish there and merely as social work on humanitarian grounds, I decided to have the temple restored so that the people would at least have a clean place to get together. I got together about 25 men, made them understand these ideas and collected a fund from all the willing residents of the village. It was enough to restore the whole temple, even with an image of Sant Tukaram. The opening was a great event. All men, women and children very enthusiastically took part in the celebrations. The fact that a Muslim like me did all this for them, touched them deeply. Everyone realized that without any feeling of religious differences, my family shared their joys and was one with them. Since then we are treated like one of their own families. Now every evening there are devotional songs sung in the temple and festivals celebrated. Our house being very close, my family also takes part in these functions. Thus, the

village Hindu society has much respect for our family and Muslims on the whole. I too had the satisfaction of doing something for others.

“Some time after this, I was sent by my firm to the Moral Re-Armament centre at Panchgani for a training course. I met people of different religions. I became aware of how closely connected humanity and religion are. I learnt that only religion practised in its true essence can make one love his fellow human beings. This came to me as a sudden shock, for in fact all this time I was an atheist. I took a decision there to restore an old ruined mosque in my village.

By this time, a few Muslim families had settled in our village. The mosque was 250 years old. As soon as I returned from Asia Plateau, Panchgani, I got together the people of my community and explained to them the importance of collective prayers or ‘*Namaz*’. With



their help I could restore the mosque. Now we have employed a *mullah*. Our children are given religious education and taught to read the Koran. We, who can, assemble there every morning and evening for prayers. My Hindu friends also respect us. Sometimes when we are engrossed in a chat, it is they who remind us of 'Namaz' time and send us to the mosque. Because of this, I came to realize that the basic principles of all the religions are the same, just as the ideas of humanity are. I have learnt to respect the Hindu religion and the Hindus in my village respect us Muslims."





## 5 Contracts Without Kickbacks



Om Prakash Bagaria, OP to his friends, entered the family business in 1963 after qualifying as an engineer at the I.I.T. He was soon made Technical Director of Steelsworth Private Ltd., with a seat on the Board. If OP's were just one more business success story, it would be of little interest to anyone but himself. However, certain events in 1972 led him to seek 'not more money but more adventure'.

When you talk about answering corruption the comment you often meet is: 'How can I be honest when all around me are dishonest'. OP's idea of adventure involved giving the lie to this excuse. Among other things he decided that he would never pay a bribe, with the result that he must be among the very few businessmen who prefer to stand on a train rather than put a few rupees into the right pocket.

OP's struggle began when a group from MRA on a march through the Brahmaputra valley, visited Tinsukia in Upper Assam. They were advocating a life based on absolute moral standards and obedience to the will of God as the best way forward for the nation. OP was sceptical at first. "There is a devil of a person in our company", he told them. "Change J.C.Kar and I will accept your ideology."

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*\*\*Om Prakash Bagaria is an industrialist; his firm manufactures tea-machinery in Assam, Calcutta and Coimbatore.*

## **Nixon has gone to China**

Kar who was the head of the Steelsworth union, had been dismissed on a flimsy charge some eight years before. There was intense animosity between him and the management. The union had 32 points of demand in front of the company. In March 1972 the workers burnt effigies of management men in front of the factory. The Managing Director, who also happened to be OP's uncle, was greatly upset, and the following day had a heart attack. When he regained consciousness, he beckoned OP and his colleagues to his bed-side and murmured: "Nixon has gone to China..." His indication, clearly was, "if the powerful President of such a prosperous nation can go to China in his quest for peace, why can't you fellows put aside your false pride and talk to your men?" This was a few weeks before the marchers arrived.

To OP's surprise, Kar accepted an invitation to listen to the marchers. Kar told one of them afterwards, "Even if we admit our mistakes, how can we be sure that the management will admit theirs?"

OP was not a religious man – "I went to the company's temple only because it was my job to make sure the tube lights were working" – but shortly after this he was taking part in prayers for his uncle's recovery. Suddenly a compelling thought struck him: he had done nothing for a worker who had been bed-ridden for six months with a knee injury. OP went to his house and asked him to see a specialist, promising to cover all costs.

OP's action somehow gave him the courage to approach Kar. "Why are we afraid of each other" said OP, "Bring your friends to my house and we'll have a chat."

OP told the workers that if they withdrew their unjustified demands, he would fight for their justified demands. Within three hours, they had reached

verbal agreement on all points. OP promised that he would take the responsibility for signing an agreement on behalf of his Board.

The Managing Director's reaction? 'He was very happy and said that the concessions were less than what the Board were prepared to give.' Kar organised a general meeting in which OP said "This wall between us was built brick by brick – one laid by the workers and the next by us. Let us make sure it doesn't come up again." Said J.C.Kar, "To build an exploitation-free society many ideas are tried, laws are made, systems are created. We have also struggled a lot and were ready for more. But today we have found a new path – changing oneself and then taking the other person along."

### **Winning contracts without bribing**

In 1973 OP took charge of modernising Steelsworth's Gauhati factory. It employed 300 men making, among other things, steel doors and windows. To get orders OP had to fill in tenders. It was a testing time as job after job was given to rival firms. "I could not bring myself to pay bribes," OP explains. He waged a protracted struggle and eventually won contracts without bribing to make heat-exchangers, pressure vessels and other items for the oil industry. It is on such products that the factory's current profitability is based.

Two years ago, OP set up a factory in Coimbatore. He applied for power from the electricity board. He began to receive messages, "Come to our office, we've sanctioned 35 kilowatts." Knowing they wanted to see him to ask for a bribe, OP delayed for a long time. But one day he prayed to be 'completely free of bitterness, condemnation and superiority' and went to the office. He told the official, "How much would you take from me – one thousand rupees? Isn't friendship worth more than one thousand rupees?"

Will one Rajiv Gandhi clean up the whole of India? Doesn't he need people like us?"

The man almost jumped up from his seat. "We need people like you," he said. He promised to connect 35 kws within a week and an additional 30 kws – the total amount applied for – within a month. "God does not want us to be martyrs but to win," comments OP.

### **Man has gone to the moon**

Once OP returned to Tinsukia from a business trip and found there was a fight between the Biharis and Assamese in his factory. Within a few days he found himself sitting with both groups. After a time of seeking direction in silence from the Inner Voice, a tribal Assamese apprentice said, "I am sorry for my attitude and behaviour. Man has gone to the moon and here we are quarrelling over little things." OP says simply, "A gift of unity was given." Before long, the men started an agricultural co-operative to help increase the income of the surrounding villages.

"Industry," says OP, "with its resources and manpower, can bridge the gap between the organised industrial workers and the rural poor – if it has the will."

### **A Nursery for the Children**

His wife, Pushpa, spoke at a conference in January '88 – of the fellowship across the continents that they had found through MRA, without which their lives would have continued in a restricted arena. She had a nursery just for her son and a thought came to her: 'Why not a nursery school where workers' children could blossom'. Today, through that school, she has access to the homes and hearts of their mothers and tries to help them with their problems.

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## 6 Not One Man-Hour Lost



When I returned to work after my visit to Asia Plateau in 1983, there was a big strike in our company, because two workers had been suspended for bad work.

I refused to participate and my opponents said I had been bought by the company. But I stood my ground and endeavoured to bring the strike to an end. The union would have lost face if they had given up the strike.

In the spirit of absolute honesty and unselfishness we started negotiations with the Managing Director.

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*\*\*Dilip Rasane, President, Bajaj Tempo Workers' Union, Pune.*

Negotiations continued for eight days and whatever we discussed we passed on to the workers. But the militant union delegates demonstrated and I was ousted from the negotiations.

The next day I started work in the factory with some of my friends. I told the press about my stand: 'Please have faith in me. On the basis of MRA the end will always be good.' Within 20 days the entire factory was back at work. The two men were reinstated as part of the settlement.

Productivity had come down to 32 vehicles per day. Now it has increased to 42 to 45 – and the management has increased our wages.

I never used to pay attention to my home. The atmosphere was disturbed. There were disputes and quarrels. When I returned from Asia Plateau I got all the people in the house together and apologised to them. Now I would like to pass on what I have found to my friends.

### **Postscript**

An international team of Indians and foreigners visited Bajaj Tempo in 1987. H.K.Firodia, the then Chairman, evaluating the impact of the Asia Plateau MRA Industrial Seminars on his company through the people who had participated in the Panchgani Seminars observed, "Since the new settlement reached with the Union after their exposure to the MRA Seminars, not a day of work has been lost in our company."

One of the officers from the Personnel Department added, "Sir, it will be true to say not an hour of work has been lost due to disputes."

## 7 A Father Repents

A.R.Choudhury lost his job on the day his daughter was born. He thought that this child had brought him ill-luck and refused not only to see her but to have anything to do with her. She was forbidden to come in his presence, specially in the mornings when he was leaving for his work. This went on for nearly ten years. Choudhury was sent by his company to one of the Industrial Seminars held at Asia Plateau, the MRA Centre in Panchgani. What he heard at the seminar made him face his attitude towards his daughter. For two sleepless nights he wrestled within himself. He realised he had unjustly blamed his daughter for his own misfortune. He decided to change.

On his return to Pune – the first thing he did was to send for his daughter and called her out by her name. She was taken aback – as he had never called her by her name before. She went to him fearfully – he embraced her in his arms and in tears asked for her forgiveness.

Several months later, Choudhury returned to Asia Plateau with his family. One morning while sitting with other children his daughter Nandita, after much hesitation, shared, “After my father’s return from Asia Plateau we have found something new in our family. He tried talking to me but I did not answer him. I hated him because he blamed me for losing his job. This hurt me and I decided not to talk to him. Today I feel I am also wrong for hating him.”

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*\*\*A.R.Choudhury is an engineer at Bajaj Auto Ltd., Pune.*

Later that day Nandia apologised to her father, for her hatred towards him. This apology brought tears to her father's eyes. He hugged her. This was the first time that the father and the daughter understood each other.





## 8 From A Delhi Basti



One cannot deny the fact that the caste system still exists in modern India. The untouchables are the lowest caste and have for centuries been downtrodden. Mahatma Gandhi believed that untouchability was contrary to the true spirit of Hinduism and gave these people the name Harijans. Near Birla Mandir on Panchkuin Road, is situated the largest Harijan colony in Delhi. In 1967 Rajmohan Gandhi, the grandson of the Mahatma, visited this colony with an MRA team. Ranjit Singh, who was still at school, was one of the many who was deeply moved. Especially so when Rajmohan Gandhi took his hand and said, "Don't think of yourself as an untouchable but think what you can do for India and the world."

Ranjit Singh says :

"When Mahatma Gandhi visited New Delhi he stayed in a colony of Harijans and this is where I live. Many political and spiritual foreign leaders have come and visited our colony. Many people tried to change our way of life. But when the people of MRA first came to our colony they gave us the idea of listening to our 'Inner Voice'. We lived with hatred for the Hindus who had exploited us. But what the MRA people of various races and nations were doing together gave us the

vision and hope that we could do something for the world. We made some decisions in our lives and we expressed them to our people.

Several years later, I worked as a messenger in a local tax office. It became highly lucrative for me as the inspectors would give twenty or more rupees a day to keep me in their favour. This led to my getting involved in gambling and drinking. I have two children. I have made them suffer a lot through my drinking. I have not given them enough food. There were times when they had to sleep hungry at night. I have beaten my wife. Friends and relatives left me when they saw me in this state. That was when I made a final decision to base my life on the absolute moral standards of Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love. My wife gave me her full support and told me she would manage with the honest pay packet. I have decided never to accept bribes and have made this known to my friends at the office”.

Babulal, a friend of Ranjit Singh, is a weight-lifter. He, along with others in his colony, started a school for children who were getting into bad company.

“I am from a community who have been trampled on and where ears have been filled with glass. We have suffered tremendously. People have been cruel to us. We were not allowed to walk on the road. We had to clean places before sunrise. We could not take water from the same well as others. You can imagine the anger that was inside us. Even today those things have not disappeared. But if we decide now to take revenge for what we have gone through, that will not be a solution. It will only mean that I am treating others as they have treated me. Then I would be no

better than them. This is not what God wants. If he has created His world we have to live His way, learning to love those who have caused us suffering.

When an MRA team came to Delhi, friends in our colony started listening to their 'inner voice' – one day I said to myself, I might as well try it out. I didn't know how God would speak to me. But a very clear thought flashed into my mind. I had many friends but I was a bully and always fighting with people around me.

Because of my quarrels my friends became enemies. Whenever we met there was trouble and a fight. I may not look strong but I always come out on top. Then this thought came that I should apologise to them and ask their forgiveness. This caused in me, a tremendous upheaval. All kinds of ideas were going through my mind. If I apologise what will happen to me? Will they attack me? But all this was false. When I did apologise they not only forgave me but gave me their love. We sat together and had a cup of tea and today they are some of my best friends in that area." The number of people taking responsibility for the colony and beyond, is growing.



## 9 Honest Alternatives



Life was becoming a boring routine, a regular humdrum. So I dropped out of college to play music with my friends. I started to experiment with LSD and hashish. I did not do much of that but their effect on me was devastating. I felt lost and life seemed meaningless. The hypocrisy and veneer of my life showed so clearly. I thought under the 'skin' of my personality there was nothing – I was dead. Being a philosophic type I started to search for the 'Way'. At this time, I met MRA and became responsible for the Farm at Asia Plateau. I decided at once it was a 'square', 'goody-goody', organisation. With drug-trained eyes of dissection I saw it as another anaesthetic, another catharsis, another movement, that people were drawn to so that they might hide from the loneliness and awesome mystery of their lives.

I lived this way for some years, sometimes flirting with the ideas of MRA but mostly feeling quite elevated and above its plane. Then one day I heard a voice like a shout in my heart. It is said that I was not going to find any mystical revelation that would transform me

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*\*\*Leslie Nazareth – a young man from Bombay in charge of the farm at Asia Plateau.*

because I was a coward. I had believed that putting things right with people was a psychological trick to release them from feelings of guilt. I did not need it. The voice was insistent. I knew it was true. I saw that my philosophy was a shield behind which I hid the weaker parts of my character. I had a sincere and honest face but in secret my thoughts and actions were shallow. I would hate anyone, especially older people, to know the truth. I finally decided to wait no longer and to do what God's voice guided me to do, no matter how humiliating and painful it may be.

This seemed to remove a plug. For the first time I heard His voice clearly telling me what I should do and be. I had to get honest about the impurity of my thoughts and actions and let the light in on the dark and shameful corners of my life.

I had wilfully decided never to return some records, cassettes and costly books lent to me by close friends. When I found the courage to return them and say why I was doing it, I found that my pride in my image had stood in the way.

This has shown me how a part of me will always try and hide from the light of God's plan. But as long as I continue to fight this battle intensely, life will never be boring. It is not a war to keep within me alone. I have begun to see it is a common united struggle for the spirit of man. This is now the work of my life, which in my vain search for some more mystical release, I had almost passed by.



## 10 Why Blame Me?



When one thinks of Africa one thinks of Apartheid, the Ugandan Civil War and the Bush People. I have just returned after spending four months in Zimbabwe, Uganda and Kenya. It was my first visit to these countries and a chance to understand their feelings and aspirations.

Our group arrived at a farm in Gweru, the Midland Province of Zimbabwe. This farm was given by a white Zimbabwean for the work of Moral Re-Armament. Soon after my arrival I noticed that the farm manager, a black Zimbabwean, was not very welcoming. But I put it out of my mind.

Several weeks passed and we were getting ready to move to Harare. On the day of our departure, the farm manager came to us and said he would like to apologise to me. He explained that he had studied for his agricultural degree in Bihar, in North India. During his stay there he was shamefully treated by people who teased him, called him 'black' and spat at him. The memory of these incidents still hurt him very much and he wanted to take revenge. So when he saw me, an Indian, he wanted to treat me in the same way.

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*\*\*Jyothi Subrahmanyam – a young lady from Salem. Works as a Secretary, Asia Plateau.*

'Somehow God protected you from such treatment,' he said, 'and I want to ask your forgiveness for my ill feeling.'

I was very angry and thought, 'why should I be blamed.' I am not responsible for what happened to him in North India. I come from the South.'

I was keen to forget this incident but my conscience would not allow it. Everytime I sat quiet the thought came, 'You are responsible. How quick you are to divide India by saying, North and South'. I realised that if I could have this attitude towards my country then how could I expect my people to be united. So I decided to apologise to him.

When we returned to Gweru I went to their home and told the farm manager how sorry I was and wanted to take full responsibility for what my people had done. I see how ready we are to judge another family, society or country, but we easily forget to look at ourselves.



## 11 An Explosive Answer

On the outskirts of Hyderabad, surrounded by the most intriguing rock formations, is situated the "Indian Detonators Limited" factory. It boasts of being the highest paying concern and the second largest private industry in the state. The company manufactures detonators and different explosives ranking amongst the highest number in the world of small sized explosives used in coal mines.

With two factions in a tug-of-war in the recognised union, IDL industrial relations have had an equally "explosive" history with intimidations, forcible detention of managers and stabbings. In March and April of 1983, two groups of nine couples carefully chosen to represent management, both factions of the union and workers – were delegates at the regular MRA training programmes for industry at Asia Plateau Panchgani.

Earlier the workers had refused any proposal from the management to attend seminars and conferences. As they had seen a remarkable difference in their Chairman-cum-Managing Director, Shri M.Varadarajan, they agreed.

G.Satyanarayana, General Secretary of the union, medium built, dark with an imposing large, vermilion dot on his forehead, was feared by some of his workers. He had a notorious reputation for paan-chewing and drinking. At the concluding session of the conference he shared his decision to stop drinking, chewing paan and to care for his children and help them with their studies. Speaking about his union activities he declared, "Leadership





through the inner voice may have its challenges as far as my position in the union is concerned. I am willing to sacrifice it. The role God shows is my first priority". On their return some of these men, who were known for fury and violence, became better leaders. One could even see some amity between the factions. Women workers especially couldn't believe the change in their leader Satyanarayana. He, who used to go out every hour for paan, did not do so any more, inducing a certain curiosity about MRA ideas. In order that more people get an opportunity to glimpse and grasp this new idea, these men whole-heartedly backed the Chairman in arranging a novel 4-day conference entitled, "The family and the factory", at Hyderabad in July 1983. The Chairman-cum-Managing Director, the Executive

Director, trade union secretary and executives with wives and 40 employees with their wives participated from 8.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. all 4 days of the conference.

"Is MRA the one technique of getting people to work with their hearts?" posed Shri Varadarajan, Chairman-cum-Managing Director. "Our Company, since its beginning 22 years ago, has given every amenity to the worker. He continued, "We of the Management have had shortcomings and have been selfish. It is easier to meet the economic demands of the workers than to enrich the quality of their lives. Fifty-eight families taking MRA training: could this be what will make happier homes, neighbourhoods and communities?"

One of the participants, Surbinder Kaur, wife of a production-group leader, despite her shyness, said at the end, almost tearfully, "You have given us knowledge that is rare and priceless". Husband Jeewan Singh added, "You give me two months wages and you give me hardly anything. You give me this idea and you give me everything".

Evaluating the four-day seminar, Shri Varadarajan described his experience at one of the group discussions. He had asked one of the wives who had sat quietly behind her husband all through, what she had to say. She replied that her husband, a good-for-nothing drunkard, used to beat her up regularly. He returned from an MRA seminar and stopped all that and brought his salary home for the first time in their married life. She expressed her deep gratitude for the change in the family. Mr Varadarajan said, "What has happened in her family alone is worth the whole programme we have just concluded".

In October the same year, the union elections were conducted peacefully for the first time. The credit for this was given to the men who formed "The MRA peace committee".



## 12 I No Longer Feel Deprived



I live in Bombay with my three sons and a daughter-in-law. In 1969, I faced a tragedy in my life. I lost a wonderful husband who left me with three very young boys. I did not know what to do, for that man had loved me very much and all of a sudden I was left shattered and my life became very empty and without purpose. I lost interest in my home, in my cooking and hardly gave a thought to my children, who may have often wondered at the gloom which overcame me. I became bitter and very self-concerned and some friends described me as “that poor thing, who’s lost her husband” and so life went on for me without a will to live.

I had always believed in God, for my parents taught me to, but at that point did I really believe? It was at that time I had my first meeting with MRA friends. One young Turkish friend and an English one insisted I know about guidance – listening to the “inner voice”. I thought, “it’s O.K. for them to preach about this and that – what do they know about what I have suffered?” But something stirred inside me for a better life for my sons and I therefore experimented with guidance – never expecting that it would change my life. The first

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– Mrs. Sarla Kapadia, a housewife from Bombay.

thought was “love – absolute love – did I really love my children absolutely? Shouldn’t I care for their needs when they were so young? (2) Unselfishness – I was driving my family crazy with my lament over my husband’s death. (3) Purity – my mind was crowded with wrong thoughts. After all, I was married once, what now?”

Each day guidance made me feel a different person. Friends in MRA would often visit me and I no longer felt a sense of being deprived or being unhappy. Each day God showed me the way and not my instincts as previously.

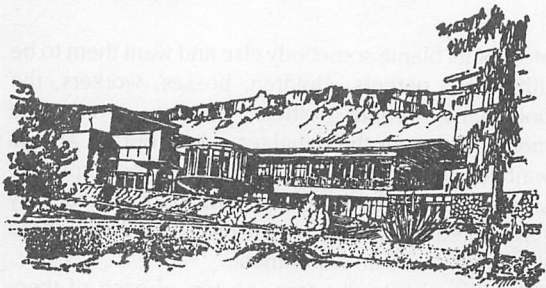
That was in 1969 and today I often look at the three towering boys, or rather young men, and often wonder what our fate would have been if I was not taught to listen and obey.

My next fear was – when they grew up, would they leave and make their own way into the world? In fact, I am fearful like every Indian mother. But quiet times tell me they are the children of God and they too have a right to their lives without my demands. I must realise that only the Almighty can control people’s lives, not I.

As parents we must allow them to grow freely in their own right, not to pressurise them with our problems or our dissatisfactions. We need to create time for them no matter how busy and pressurised we may be. We have got to give them our time everyday, we must do things together, we’ve got to include them in our life for they are very important people. I feel as parents we truly need to practise what we preach to our children. That can come about only if we listen to our inner voice, for it can show the way – the way it did for me!



## Asia Plateau



Situated in Panchgani in the Western Ghats of Maharashtra, Asia Plateau rests against the famous red basalt table land and overlooks the Krishna valley. It has been built and is being maintained by the sacrificial giving of thousands.

Conferences and industrial seminars are regularly held there. Those interested in applying the ideas of this book would be welcome at Asia Plateau and would, of course, be expected to cover their expenses.

### **Money**

Like India's freedom struggle, this work is financed by gifts large and small from those who believe in it. There are many who work full-time without salary to carry this idea forward. You can contribute towards their expenses and send your gifts or donations to the address below :

Friends of Moral Re-Armament (India)

Asia Plateau, Panchgani

Maharashtra-412 805.

Donations are exempt from tax under Section 80 (G) of the Income Tax Act.

## Your Chance

Most of us blame somebody else and want them to be different – parents, children, bosses, workers, the politicians, some other country, even the mother-in-law or the daughter-in-law, but we always wait for the other person to begin. The explosive secret behind all the stories in this book, is that they have dared to start with themselves first. You can do the same. Make an experiment.

Take four sheets of paper, on top of each of them write down one of the following absolute standards separately :

Absolute Honesty

Absolute Purity

Absolute Unselfishness

Absolute Love

Sincerely ask yourself whether you have not been truly honest:cheated in an exam, not paid your taxes, told a lie on the telephone. Keep writing all the thoughts that come to you, however small or difficult. Those will be the first steps in a new maturity and responsibility. Have a good look at all you write and then ask your inner voice what you should do to put right all the wrongs you may have done. It may involve apologising to your teacher or boss or worker, admitting your mistakes, paying the tax or seeking the forgiveness of your wife whom you may have wronged or told lies to. But act on what the inner voice dictates. Big doors swing on small hinges – your first steps may look small but they may prepare you for big tasks ahead.

Help to change others. People or family members do

not change by sermons on morality or good advice. They respond when we tell them where we have made mistakes and how we made the decision to put them right and to change on them.

Make it a habit to listen to the Inner Voice. It is the voice within each one of us telling us right from wrong – showing us the good road to take and the bad road to avoid. The best time to listen is in the early morning before the rush of the day begins. Start with 20 minutes and soon you may find you need longer – specially if you are very busy. The important thing is to write down all the thoughts that the inner voice gives you so that they are not wasted and can be acted upon. You may get ideas on what can be different in your home, office, factory, village or school and how to bring it about.

As you are honest about your mistakes you will interest other people. If you have changed in your attitudes and motives, you will enlist them to work with you.

Do not be a bit worried if not everyone supports you. Opposition is an indication of your effectiveness. Not everyone responds whole-heartedly to a challenge like this one.

If you keep on going, you will influence those who oppose you. Often those who have opposed most bitterly have turned into the staunchest of allies.

You may think that you have pretty exciting plans for your life. You may be dissatisfied with what you have lined up. But God's plan for your life will be the most satisfying of all.

This is your chance; an invitation to the biggest adventure of your life.



# Questions & Answers on MRA

## 1. Isn't it the system that needs to change?

Yes. Unjust, ineffective systems must be changed. But experience shows that unless a change of system is accompanied by a change in men's motives, the new system will quickly inherit the defects of the old. Hans Bockler, when Chairman of the West German Trade Union Congress said, "When men change, the structure of society changes. When the structure of society changes men change. Both go together and both are necessary".

## 2. What can MRA do to answer poverty?

To get rid of poverty we need economic plans but also determined and incorruptible men and women who can make these plans work. MRA gives men the incentive and motivation to be honest and unselfish enough to make economic plans work.

## 3. Why do you need absolute moral standards?

A standard that is not absolute is not a standard. One would not like to live in the vicinity of the Bhakra Nangal Dam if each engineer had used relative standards in its construction.

You would not like to buy cloth from a shop keeper whose measure is not absolute.

We may not reach absolute standards but they give us a target to work towards.

## 4. Is MRA a new religion?

No. It is a new determination to put age old principles into action. It helps those who have a religion to live

it effectively and those without religion to find discipline and direction in their lives.

### **5. Is MRA affiliated to any political party?**

No. MRA has nothing to do with politics but politicians who apply these moral standards and ideas in their lives and action, will be in grave danger of becoming statesmen!



## Some MRA Publications

**The Art of Remaking Men** : Dr. Paul Campbell, shows how the driving forces in people for sex, security and success can be harnessed for an unselfish purpose and which may be earth shaking! (Available in English, Hindi and Tamil). Rs.10.

**Happy Families** : Elizabeth Bradburne and Kathleen Voller – A Practical book suitable for children of 4-15 years in teaching them moral values and ethics. (available in English, Hindi and Gujarati) Rs.10.

**The Way Ahead** : Joy Weeks and Ann Rignall. A training course in leadership and responsibility written in India out of their experiences. Suitable for 13-19 year olds. It explores the application of moral and spiritual values.

**Asia Plateau Pictorial** : It tells about how Asia Plateau, the Moral Re-Armament Centre, was built through sacrificial giving of over 32,000 families and explaining the activities at the Moral Re-Armament Centre. Rs.8.

**Frank Buchman as I Knew Him** : H.W. 'Bunny' Austin. Austin wields his pen as deftly as he once did his tennis racquet. Rs.5.

**Above The Smoke and Stir** : Poems by Peter Howard. Farmer, journalist and playwright. Rs.10.

**45 Years With Philips** : Dr. Frederick Philips, former President of Philips Electrical Industries, Holland, employing 380,000 people in 70 countries, writes with engaging frankness of family life, labour relations and a multinational corporation's responsibilities towards the Third World. Rs.60.

**They Call Me an Impeccable Imperialist** : Lionel Jardine – The remarkable story of a British Civil Servant in undivided India, and the effect of his change from an absolute autocrat to a servant of the people. Rs.20.

**Ashana Kirano (Gujarati)** : Stories of ordinary people who affected society by their own change. Rs.2.

Available from Asia Plateau, Panchgani 412 805, Dist.Satara, Maharashtra (Postage extra).

