

A Field Worker's Diary _Part 38

On the fourth day of our Washington trip, our first appointment was with Alice Nelson, the Chief Executive Officer of Vital Voices. This organisation works in identifying women leaders in 184 countries working in areas such as human rights, trafficking, women entrepreneurship, etc., giving them fellowships, and guiding them to become more stronger leaders through various training sessions. I felt very happy seeing Sunitha Krishnan, who runs the Prajwala organisation for curbing women trafficking, in the video Alice showed to explain the various programs taken up by the organisation. Afterwards, Alice also conducted a small workshop on the topic of women leadership for us.

From there, we went to the United Nations Foundation office. We were received there by Melissa, one of the Directors there, and an Indian youth called Sunita Rao. In the office, they explained to us about a program called the 'Girl Up' that they were implementing. This 'Girl App' program facilitates American teenage girls to create programs on their own for girls in under-developed countries. Young girls who are running development programs for girls in various countries came and explained about the projects they were implementing through the 'Girl Up' program. All the girls were in the 14 to 17 age group. What I liked more than their projects was their self-confidence and their belief in their projects. That evening, Sinthu, Subha, the Nepali girl, and I didn't go on our usual sojourn to the White House, instead, we went to the Washington Monument and sat down on the vast lawn around it and chatted for a long time till night. Though Sinthu had told us a little about the work she did in Sri Lanka, she went on to explain more in depth about what she did. Sinthu said that she belonged to the Jaffna area in Sri Lanka, which was a war-torn area. In Jaffna, she worked in an organisation called the Jaffna Social Action Centre that worked for the rehabilitation of women who have been widowed in that war and are single-handedly running the family. The almost-25 year civil war between LTTE and the Sri Lanka government had dealt a big blow to the area. Filled with widowed woman and youth depressed due to lack of employment opportunities, and then invisible population who had migrated to other areas to escape the horrors of war, Jaffna area stood miles away from development. After the civil war ended in 2009, many of those who had migrated in the past due the war situation started coming back to the area. The organisation that Sinthu works with provides livelihoods to returning migrant workers and widowed women and rehabilitates them. The organisation has left no stone unturned in running numerous programs such as houses and toilets, giving them skills training,

establishing public institutions, creating employment opportunities, etc.. to bring the people of this area out of the problems they are facing and back to living a normal life. Sinthu was a key member in that organisation. Not only in that, Sinthu also had an active role to play in another movement called Vallami that was fighting to curb all types of violence against women. The next day, a Friday, we first went to an organisation called Running Start that works towards increasing women's representation in politics.

They select young women who have leadership qualities and interest in politics and strives to increase their awareness so as to facilitate them to excel in politics and to run for various positions. The Vice-president of Running Start, Melissa, stated with pride that many women who were mentored through the organisation were in various positions. That afternoon, we went to another organisation called National Partnership for Women and Families. That organisation does advocacy towards formulating government policies that are favorable to all communities, including women. That day was our last day in Washington. The next morning, we had to leave early for Boston.

Our coordinators had the necessary permissions and funds to spend some money for the whole of our team's entertainment activities. They told us that they will take us to the John F Kennedy Centre for Performing Arts that night and asked us to select one play for us to go to from the numerous plays being performed there. Each of us selected a different play based on our individual interests. I didn't know which one to select, so I asked my coordinator to guide me. He advised me to go to a stage show called Cabaret. Along with me, 6 more members of our team also selected the same program. So, we finished our last day on our Washington trip by watching the show and went out for dinner and reached our hotel. Our four coordinators — Jennifer, Ella, Voitek and Jonathan — who had borne us with much patience, told us to be ready for going to the airport for going to Boston in the early morning, and returned. Thus ended our trip to Washington, but the questions raised by Alice in the workshop at Vital Voices the day before still lingered in my mind.

Am I enjoying what I am doing?

Am I curious to do that?

Am I passionate to do that?

Am I being challenged at my work?

And the last and most important one:

Am I going to do the same for the rest of my life?

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