

#LPRD# A Field Worker's Diary [#Part 44](#) # 8 September 2020

Seattle was the final destination of our trip to the United States as part of the International Visitor Leadership Program. From Kansas city, we started early on August 9, 2017 and reached Seattle. By that time, all the members who had been divided into different teams and sent to different cities met there. That afternoon, we all went to the World Trade Center office together. There, Dr. Christina Mayor, a senior faculty at the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy under University of Washington, conducted a workshop on the topic of 'Nonprofit Leadership and Management' for us. Christina explained us the intricacies of certain things like the leadership skills necessary to run a voluntary organisation, what sort of qualified people do we need to pick as Board members for the smooth functioning of an organisation, etc.. Of all the things she explained that day, her talk about advocacy made an indelible impression on me. Her opinion was that 'Advocacy is the hugely under-utilized tool in the non-profit sector'.

Christina once again reiterated the importance of research and data, which had been much-talked about in most of the organisations that I had visited in the USA.

We had clearly understood yet again that we can't show a proper, sustainable solution to an issue if we don't conduct a full-scale research on the issue, collect the statistics, analyze them, understand it from all angles before we start working on the issue. That evening, we left our hotel and went to see the Seattle Space Needle while touching the Amazon company head office en route. The Space Needle was a 605 foot high structure. If you go on top of it with the help of an elevator, you can see the whole of the Seattle city. The glass sculptures that can be seen in the Chihuly Garden and Glass Museum next to it are a marvel.

My friend Navneeta and her younger sister Dolly's families live in Seattle. When I was in the city, Navneeta had gone to Hyderabad but Dolly came and took me to her house. Their hospitality, the Telugu people I saw everywhere in Seattle, and a Telugu meal I had eaten in a food truck, made it seem to me that I had already arrived in Hyderabad.

We visited three organisations the next day. The organisation called Ignite introduces role models to adolescent girls and helps them achieve their goals by conducting mentorship programs for them. I was delighted to learn that successful women from various fields go and meet girls studying in schools and colleges of Seattle and guide them through the program. It was so good to see women who were studying, doing jobs, or running businesses, and basically settled in life, come forward to give support to girls who don't have clarity about their career. Girl Geek Dinners was another organisation we went to. Truth be spoken, the work that they do might seem really small. They organise a dinner once or twice a month for youngsters studying in schools and colleges and women working in various tech companies. They facilitate the forming of a network for girls and help them to clear all their doubts regarding technology.

Through this interaction, there is an increase in interest in technical courses and technology related careers among the girls. Those who understand the need for a good network in professional growth will and can appreciate how important the work done by the organization is. The Tech Bridge Girls organisation encourages girls to take up STEM (STEM- Science Technology Engineering Maths) education. They run a number of programs aimed at increasing women's representation in fields such as science, research and technology. At the school level, the organization aims to increase girls' interest in technical fields by setting up coding clubs, giving them coding projects and organizing competitions in them.

The words I heard there — Too often we give children answers to remember rather than problems to solve — were really valuable. This was the last organisation we went to.

The next day was the closing day of our program. Robert Means, who met us the first day in Washington, came to that last event. He asked us all about our experiences during the trip. Since all our team members were travelling to their respective countries soon, they left us to spend some time together. Our return trip was early the next day. My Sri Lankan friend Sinthu and I traveled till Dallas together. From there, we went our ways. After saying goodbye to her, I boarded a flight to Abu Dhabi. Just at the time of takeoff, heavy rainfall stalled our journey. Our flight finally started after a 3 hour delay. As I, and many others, had missed the connecting flight from Abu Dhabi to Hyderabad, the airlines arranged a special flight around 8 hours later. They had also arranged a food coupon and a sleeping pod to take some rest for all those who missed their flights. Spending a total of 36 hours flying time due to the delays and three consecutive flights from Seattle to Dallas, Dallas to Abu Dhabi and Abu Dhabi to Hyderabad didn't managed to irritate me, but the movie 'Premam', which I watched due to boredom during the flight from Abu Dhabi to Hyderabad, tested my patience a lot.

As our coordinator Jonathan always used to say 'Hello, people of the Earth, this was a journey that gave us friends from all over the world. Our coordinator Voytek, who took care of me from the moment I got hurt in Chicago, and I used to frequently discuss a lot of things. While returning to the hotel after roaming around late at night in Kansas city, Voytek asked me some questions, "Can you roam in your country like this at this time? Do you feel this safe in your own country?" For which, I still don't have answers.

While many valuable experiences, new learnings stand tall on one side, the chance of seeing another side of America, which was different from what we had heard about America since childhood, was an unforgettable experience in itself. There is a unique 'culture of inclusion' that includes people with disabilities, people with special needs, and immigrants from other countries into their country, understands the different needs they have and also makes arrangements to meet those needs. I came back thinking that our society, in which some of us exclude ourselves in the name of castes, religions and sects, has a lot to learn from such an inclusive society.

@ Bharathi Kode