

Although India continues to struggle with strongly hierarchical values we at Pipal Tree have attempted to create a participatory and decentralized approach. This has led to rich dividends with most staff members taking ownership and doing their best to achieve the goals of personal, social and ecological liberation with the marginalized and downtrodden. We strongly believe that we have to be self-critical ourselves so that we retain our human focus and avoid the traps of self-complacency.

When the invitation arrived to attend Sahakarini's 'Loaves and Fishes' event I had some preliminary anxieties, as did Varghese, and possibly other members of the Sahakarini team in Camrose. Firstly, was it worthwhile to get someone from such a long distance for a single event. (It eventually turned out to be several events). Couldn't we do it over Skype? And a host of other questions. But all these anxieties were quickly dispelled when I got to Camrose.

To begin with, I was blown over by the warmth and purpose of the Sahakarini team as they went about giving the final touches to the 'Loaves and Fishes dinner'. If we at Pipal Tree were struggling with participation and decentralization, Becky and her team were doing their work with democratic ease and grace, with smiles and good cheer in abundance. At Pipal Tree, we have the consolation of getting paid to do the things we are doing, but everybody at Sahakarini is a volunteer. The dedication, compassion and spontaneity of the Sahakarini team deeply touched me.

The 'Loaves and Fishes' evening itself was a huge success. My eyes popped when I saw that the simple bead earrings and bamboo mugs made by our girl children at Childrens College were auctioned for more than a thousand dollars. (When I returned, our girls were both amused and excited that their craftwork was so highly appreciated. I think they didn't miss the point that where there is love, there is genuine gratitude for even the modest offering they made.). The auction was fun. The few speakers spoke inspiringly and made everybody feel that they were deeply connecting to the empowerment of people in Africa and India.

The event at University of Alberta (Varghese, Please fill in the name of the event) brought together some of the finest inspirational minds I have seen in the field of sustainable futures. The quality of the presentations and discussions were remarkable. Likewise, my two meetings with the Rotary Clubs surprised me. In place of staid and formal businessmen, I met an informal and humane bunch of people who were deeply concerned with what was happening around the world and wished to make a contribution to alleviate poverty and ecological degradation.

Not to miss out the excellent chicken dinner that Dean Allen Berger prepared at his apartment. Allen could have made a great chef at a pricey restaurant. Thanks Allen! (Usha and Varghese were also with me that evening to join Becky's sparkling conversation while Allen made the chicken).

I came back feeling humbled that there were so many people in Camrose who went out of their way to make a contribution to the tribal girls of Children's College, girls they had never met, and might never meet in the future. This is true compassion and responsibility at work.

I also came away feeling that Sahakarini evoked the compassionate heart of the earth, the voice of the earth... the consciousness of the earth to do good.