

Celebration of Transparency, Inclusiveness and Participation:

Annual general body meeting of USM Indore



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I was in a hospital in Kerala, managed by a Catholic organization, when an agreement was reached in the presence of the Chief Minister of Kerala between the management of the private hospitals and the striking nurses of private hospitals regarding the minimum salary for nurses. I interacted with some nurses to know their response to the agreement. All of them said that they were happy because justice is done to them. The nurses and the management deserve appreciation for coming to an amicable agreement and could avoid ordeal for thousands of patients in the event of a prolonged strike by the nurses.

I also talked to a representative of the management of that hospital. She said that the burden of increasing the salary would have to be borne ultimately by the patients and the patients would be blaming the management for the increased cost of healthcare. I asked her “Why don’t you make public, the summary of the annual income and expenditure of the hospital based on the audited statement of account”? She hesitated to respond to my suggestion. I shared with her the practice of Universal Solidarity Movement (USM) Indore of making available to the public, a copy of the annual audited statement of account along with the annual report. The annual report and the annual audited statement are published and uploaded on the website of USM and made available to all those who are associated with it.

USM may be the only organization in India, the Annual General Body meeting of which is open to anyone who wants to participate in it. Besides the formal members, forty five students and teachers from different schools in India and more than a dozen prominent citizens of Indore participated in the Annual General Body meeting of the organization held on July 16 at USM national office, Indore. All documents, like annual report, annual audited statement of account, annual budget etc., were given to all



participants. They were free to ask clarifications and propose suggestions for the better functioning of the organization. Besides giving a printed copy of the audited statement of account, an analysis of the account was presented, using power point presentation. USM takes special care to include all stakeholders in its functioning. This has been a practice followed by USM for the last fifteen years.

78 percent of the income of USM is generated through training programmes, sale of USM publications and conducting seminars and workshops in different organizations and institutions. For the last 15 years USM has not applied for funds to any donor agency or the government. Contribution from individuals and organizations are accepted, but no request is made to any organization for donations. Since its inception in 1993, USM has been following a policy of not owning any landed property or building and has been functioning in rented premises. The present building is the third one.

The functioning of USM for the last 24 years in rented premises without owning land and building and at the same time expanding and intensifying its activities is indeed a trend setting. Often many NGOs and institutions are concerned with creating infrastructure and as a result the mission suffers. On the other hand USM has been focusing on its mission by evolving creative and innovative approaches and activities. Its programmes like One week leadership training for High School students,

Training for teachers as mentors, Seminar for parents on 'the role of parents in education', One week leadership training for the heads and managers of institutions, Knit India and Youth Action magazine are the result of an evolutionary process. Its policies like open AGM, not to apply for funds and utter faith in the providence of God, inclusive inter-religious and inter-cultural community life at its head office in Indore, remembering every day at 9.00 p.m. before the daily evaluation all those associates and friends of USM, who have left this world and thanking them etc. are the result of constant reflection, evaluation and taking feedback from the stakeholders.

On 15th July a special gathering of the students, teachers, principals and friends of USM was held from 5.00 to 8.00 at USM national office, Indore. 45 persons from different parts of India participated in this gathering and they shared their experience of transformation in themselves and the changes that they have noticed in students who are the members of USM. The sharing of stories of transformation by the participants showed that USM is moving



towards the realization of its vision of building a civilization of love.

16th July is the foundation day of USM and it is celebrated every year. It is a gathering of USM team members, collaborators, associates and friends to celebrate its achievements in realizing its vision of building a civilization of love. Naturally a glimpse of various activities of the year is shared with the participants. 24th Foundation day being the inauguration of the silver jubilee of USM, a talk on the topic, 'Pluralism, the spiritual heritage of India' by Dr. Sudarsan Iyyengar, former Vice-Chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapeeth, was arranged. The analysis of the present socio-political situation by Dr. Sudarsan and sharing by Mr. Chinmay Mishra, a scholar and social activist, and Mr. Shravan Garg, a renowned journalist, of their views with the participants contributed to the richness to the foundation day celebration. The participants were made aware of the urgent need for acceptance, appreciation and celebration of differences as the only way for living in harmony by different communities in India. Mr. K J Alphonse IAS, former commissioner of Delhi Development Authority formally inaugurated the Silver Jubilee of USM. Participation of about 200 persons belonging to different religions, communities and professions in the celebration added beauty and colour to the foundation day celebration.

In recent years the apprehensions of the general public in India about the



functioning of many NGOs have increased due to various reasons. Every year the government of India blacklists hundreds of NGOs because they do not comply with the legal requirements. The Ministry of Home Affairs, government of India, cancelled the registration of 20,000 NGOs under FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) in 2015-16, as they were found violating various provisions of the act. Against this backdrop the Non Profit Organizations, including the Church organizations, have to enhance their credibility before the government and the public. The best way to achieve it is to become transparent and participatory in their functioning, besides complying with all legal requirements. The experiments undertaken by USM like making public the audited statement of account and allowing non-members to participate in the Annual General Body meeting could be emulated by other Non Profit Organizations.

The Church institutions like schools, hospitals, social work centres also may adopt the practice of publishing the annual audited statement of account and inviting the representatives of the major stakeholders for the Annual General meeting of their legal bodies. Before increasing fees the schools may explain to the parents/guardians the need for hiking fees by presenting before them the financial status of the institutions. This kind of openness and transparency will increase the confidence of the public in the church institutions/organizations, leading to better cooperation and collaboration. Creation and expansion of infrastructural facilities could be undertaken by using bank loan and naturally the repayment of loan with interest will be part of the expenses. Once the people come to know that the institutions are not making profit they will be ready to support the institutions.

Transparency, inclusiveness and participation are not only the characteristics of an effective administration but also spiritual values that should guide an organization/institution. These values will surely enhance the commitment and sense of belonging of the staff and support and cooperation of the people.

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