A Report
On
Theory of Change: Ondede Perspective-Building Workshop

Venue: Visthar, Bangalore
Date: 2rd and 3rd June 2018

Organised

By

Introduction:

Ondede is a Kannada word for convergence. By recognizing and acknowledging existing movements, Ondede endeavors to link these different, but interrelated groups to various media platforms to foster productive community discourses, conduct research, and instigate action on dignity-voice-sexuality, and most crucially from the perspective of sexual minorities and the transgender community. We envision a society that provides access in a non-discriminatory and gender-just way. We have also been working towards establishing linkages between different social movements, to increase evidence based advocacy in policy and to practice and provide platform for people and movements to come together. In this context, Ondede has taken a small initiative to understand sexual violence, domestic violence, sexuality rights and transgender rights of these communities by documenting the stories of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, Jogappas, transgender persons, gender non-conforming, intersex etc through case studies in the State of Karnataka. Their stories has also be documented and heard from different stakeholders like the police departments, NGOs working with sexual minorities and women, government departments, State Human Rights Commission, hospitals etc which mad also to understand in depth about sexual violence, domestic violence, sexuality rights and transgender rights.

Therefore Ondede conducted the perspective-building 'Theory of Change' workshop by inviting the different community representative from various districts of Karnataka, and from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Pondicherry to understand Ondede's aims, and future goals to work toward. Another aim of the workshop was to bring together community members and activists from various districts of Karnataka to discuss Ondede's organisation and vision, community goals, policy-making, and the way forward. The multi-lingual workshop was held to promote an open conversation among various stakeholders and allies on organisational and funding politics, the idea of convergence and how it is beneficial for the community, common concerns such as ongoing forms of violence - domestic, social and sexual -- faced by the community. Day One sessions focussed on leadership, and how the leader can determine the future of any organisation. Participants discussed leadership and management techniques, and what they considered harmful leadership techniques. The personality of the good leader was also debated. It ended with a discussion of immediate practical concerns within Ondede, and included strategy-formation and brainstorming sessions. This report is a summary of the discussions, debates and events that were part of the two-day long workshop.

Day One: Events and Discussions

The event began with a fun introductory exercise, where all participants got into pairs, got to

know about each other and then introduced their partner to others. Akkai Padmashali, Ondede

founder and well-known community activist, welcomed the gathering and introduced the first

speaker and resource provider of the day, David Selvaraj. Mr. Selvaraj is the founder and

executive trustee of Visthar, and has been in involved in advocacy and community-organisation

for more than 35 years. An educationist with deep involvement in community based advocacy

for the rights of the marginalized in Indian society, Mr. Selvaraj offers training and capacity

building support for non-profits in India and serves as a consultant to ecumenical and secular developmental agencies in Asia and Europe.

Mr. Selvaraj also began with an exercise of his own. He passed a sheet around and asked people to talk about their impressions of it. Some people said it was a "white paper", others called it "empty" or '"pure". Everyone also discussed its various uses -- for writing, for craft etc. Mr. Selvaraj then said that people were quick to spot surface differences and define objects that way. But a poet, he said, would approach things very differently. The poet would know that paper comes from natural resources, and innately understand the interrelationship between man and nature. All participants were asked also to record what they gained from this exercise. The next activity was to connect nine dots on a sheet with just four lines. Everyone tried, with little success. Mr. Selvaraj noted that no one tried to draw lines beyond the implied boundaries of the dots, and this is can be a metaphor for how we set invisible limits to ourselves. We are socialised through our various institutions -- school, religion and family -- to adhere to certain boundaries, and never to push them, or aspire to something different. How can we transcend the limits society has imposed on us? This raised a discussion on the necessarily slow process of change, and how one can gain the courage and confidence to change the circumstances of our lives and our communities. There was a lack of unity and trust among the community, and social movements in general. Unity was strength, and where this wasn't available, there could be no change. These internal fractures were further manipulated

by the society outside. This was again followed by a writing activity, to assimilate the conversation that had happened.

What is the difference between a group and an organisation? Mr. Selvaraj posed this question next. One participant suggested that an organisation can be formed only if there is a group ready to do so. Everyone then took turns to point out the various characteristics of a group — the necessity of a leader, the need for unity for success, and the coming together of different individuals for a common purpose or a goal. Amulya suggested that a group is a more informal gathering, but an organisational, while Jagadamba pointed out that every group member is talented in different ways, and this diversity helps them all.

Sana noted that there is no hierarchy within a group, but within an organisation, there is often a structure of power, and each member is allotted duties and responsibilities. Mr. Selvaraj gave an example -- three or four people coming together to talk about cricket is a group. But if they gather more members, and form a team, then they approach an organisation, because they purpose, numbers and a narrow goal. He agreed with the perspectives of the participants, on hierarchy, formality and purpose. He also emphasised how the nature of relationships also changes in an organisation, depending on the designation of colleagues. Everyone within an organisation usually has an assigned role. But the important thing to note is that every member is a human; even the leader's role is to serve their people.

Ondede is classified as a trust (a smaller non-profit than a society or a company). All trust members are from the transgender community. Mr. Selvaraj then spoke about how friends become colleagues within the context of a formally organised space like Ondede. This relationship -- between colleagues who are also friends -- can get frayed when they work together, but Mr. Selvaraj urged everyone to maintain the required formality within a working environment, and not to relinquish duty to honor friendship. Akkai brought up a commonly expressed desire to work without hierarchy, and as equals. People usually name her or Sana as leaders of the team, but she felt that this should be dispensed with. It is important to emphasise each member's unique responsibilities, but without enforcing an order of command, so that the organisation could retain its independent functioning even when someone had to leave it. Mr. Selvaraj further stressed the importance of proper use of power. Leaders have

been known to misuse power when acquired. He said that leaders' foremost duty is to serve their people, and thus the ideal leader is a servant-leader. Such a leader has the best interests of his people at heart, and is willing to forego his own goals for them.

Mr. Selvaraj gave the example of his organisation, Visthar. He noted that if he was to retire from his duties, and the organisation collapsed as a result, then he hadn't done his job -- as a leader -- well. "The society shouldn't live and die with the founder", he said. Leaders often mistakenly assume that they are the centers of their teams. They should be able to let go of

their egos, or their personal investment in the society, and focus on how it can thrive even without them. "The leader should know that 'I am not everything'", Mr. Selvaraj said. The discussion then moved into a debate on power and rights of the leader -- what does this involve, and how much sway should a leader have? Is power a good thing or a bad thing? Participants were largely of the opinion that power is a good thing, even very useful, but is also dangerous when wielded by the wrong person, or when misused. Mr. Selvaraj spoke of how he was asked to be a part of the workshop - he was asked by his friend Akkai, who by doing so, invested in him a certain amount of power to lead the session. The right to prompt a discussion, the direction in which it goes, is all up to him, and this needn't always be a bad thing. This right, in this case, is also beneficial. Sana then asked what one should do in case of interference, or questioning of one's power. Mr. Selvaraj answered that no one can exercise one's power beyond a point -- and this point is given by the people (in his case, the other workshop participants). It is important to define the terms of reference, so that the appointed leader adheres to them. Mr. Selvaraj exhorted that a clear set of indications about the duties and expectations from the leader (not specific, but indicative of the goals of the organisation/team), would help set the limits to the leader's power. The collective voice of the group should be primary. Sana then spoke of how power works within the community, and how it is often concentrated with one person. How does one handle situations like this, which are pretty common? Often, in vulnerable groups like the transgender community, the group is the sole source of validity and livelihood, and it is hard to question the leader.

Next, Mr. Selvaraj introduced the term 'governance'. Governance has a different meaning from hierarchy-based leadership. Governance signifies fair and collectively organised management of the organisation. Governance can be organised in designations though.

Unlike a society, a trust doesn't have the roles like chairperson. Instead, it has an executive trustee, and all other trustees are all on an equal footing. Even when the executive trustee is the founder of the organisation, they don't have total power over the trust (for example, for a cheque of value above Rs. 10,000, the founder-executive trustee's signature isn't enough. Two signatures are necessary for the cheque to be valid.) Within such structures, power politics is common. Arguments and tensions -- over pay hikes, positions offered etc. -- might arise. The organisations' collective intelligence is often harvested to solve internal problems, even when there are pressing external problems to solve. Many leaders spend a considerable amount of time solving such problems. Some organisations invests energy in sounding the external environment -- noting changes in the socio-economic climate (and how this can impact the organisation), and staying alert to structural and thematic changes. Other groups are like frogs in the well -- refusing to get outside to learn from the environment, and the wider world. The capacities and culture of the organisation should match, and this cannot happen without knowledge of common goals, skills and preferred methods of operation.

The next concept on the table was the idea of accountability. Unlike individual responsibility, accountability is what every member owes to the trust. The actions of each should be

deliberated keeping in mind the health of the organisation, and its ideological goals. Thus the power of the leader is also circumscribed by her/his accountability. Hierarchy isn't necessarily wrong, but how power is used is important. Mr. Selvaraj instead recommended 'functional hierarchy', where it exists purely to organises duties. Checks and balances should be written into the system too, he urged. In such an ideal system, power is given for a purpose, and no one can be carried away with it. Hierarchy should exist without the usually attendant divides between superior and inferior positions. This is functional hierarchy.

Akkai then spoke of how some leaders become face of the community, and their voice comes to hold especial sway over public opinion. Her question was this -- how can power be distributed, in such a case? There was a short debate on the two different styles of leadership suggested so far -- the first was the less hierarchical and democratic style that Ondede favored (with few designations, but differentiated responsibilities), and the second was more formal governance, with more designations (suggested by Mr. Selvaraj). 'Power with people', rather than 'power over people', was recommended as the best approach. It is also important that one distinguishes between an organisation and a movement -- an organisation can be part of a larger social movement towards justice, and can have political goals, but also has several internal commitments and short-term responsibilities that distinguishes it from a social movement. Mr. Selvaraj spoke how NGOs are confused sometimes about ideology -- they wish to be a movement, but their identity remains that of an organisation.

The next session was about the history and future of Ondede, and was headed by the founder, Ms. Akkai Padmashali. She began by explaining the meaning of the term 'ondede'. It means 'convergence' in Kannada, and is the meeting point of progressive ideologies and people working for the rights of women, children and Trans people. Participants also noted that it meant the need to work together, united, against patriarchy, and against an intolerant society. Akkai introduced Ondede as an NGO, and an organisation that provided services that the government is not able to provide. It is a space for gender non-conforming individuals and Trans persons to know about the wider queer community, and assists them in accessing government aid or other goals. She brought up the issue of frequent sexual and domestic violence faced by members of the community, and how these are Ondede's primary concerns. Ondede members often confront families who resort to detention of their adult children, emotional or physical abuse, and who force them into marriages on learning of their queer identity. They try talking to them about queer identities, and the crucial need of family acceptance. There have been several instances of parents accepting their queer children following Ondede's intervention. Ondede also does advocacy work. Recently, it has foregrounded the urgent need to include Trans and gender non-conforming individuals in the 2004 Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act, and also anti-sexual violence laws. Other focus areas include laws that do not allow a full recognition of queer sexual and gender identities, and Trans rights. Trans rights is a broad term for a variety of social and political protections that will prevent the daily harassment of trans people when they attempt accessing public services -

- like buses, washrooms and education --, and also work towards reducing social stigma around them.

Ondede works with children's and women's groups, disability rights groups, human rights organisations, law forums and civil society groups. The present government is not very receptive to the cause of Trans rights, so this has become a concern for the organisation. This is why a convergence of various vulnerable groups is important, because there is strength in numbers. Ondede was formally constituted as a trust in 2015. Ondede's commitment is towards improving lives of its members and the Trans community, even if it means confronting abuse within the community itself. This was followed by a discussion on the definition of 'gender non-conforming' (and how this can be mapped onto terms like 'kothi'), and on family abuse and how Ondede counters this. One of the participants shared her own story, speaking about her family's reaction to her identity, and how Ondede intervened to provide awareness about queer identities, and SRS. Sana then spoke of the necessity of including trans people also in the domestic violence Act, which protects only women. Thus, violence against trans women is made invisible and cannot be criminalised as rape or domestic violence. One participant then asked Akkai about how families react to her, a famous Trans activist, showing up on their doorstep to talk to them. Akkai answered that not all cases are treated alike by Ondede, and that the intervention is tailored as much as possible to suit the applicant's needs. Each case is challenging for Ondede, she noted, because no case is like another. Sana then brought up three major issues -- the first is the case Trans women with families and children, the second of people impersonating trans women, and the third of chelas (which is the term for 'daughter' of

a senior trans woman within the jamaat system) within the trans community. She pushed these as important groups that should be addressed within the community.

The next session was a group discussion that foregrounded the needs of rural transgender women. Rural areas and rural culture is invisible in contemporary discussions of queerness in Indian public fora. The urban lens is always privileged, and the specific problems of rural Trans citizens is often neglected, or unknown.

The discussion included rural community persons from Raichur, a district in North Karnataka. They highlighted some needs as absolutely important:

1) Rural focus necessary within queer movements and organisations in urban Bangalore

2) Basic formal education for rural Trans persons

3) District focus as well as urban focus

4) Awareness programmes on transgender rights and cultures, especially for the police, who are primary aggressors.

Participants next discussed their vision for the next twenty years. One point raised was the importance of sensitisation for various stakeholders about the LGBTQ+ community. Stakeholders include parents of queer people, workplaces, educational institutions, healthcare providers, law enforcement, the judiciary, and other private service providers (like landlords). This could be furthered too, by the creation of 24/7 crisis intervention cells in every district. It was also suggested that Ondede give advocacy training, so its work ethic could be carried

forward by other members of the community. Sensitisation should also reach the government, as government officials are crucial service providers. Next, participants discussed the common problems of forced marriages (and the living situation that arises out of this), and being denied the right to live in dignity in their hometowns (when their trans identity is asserted). Being denied property rights was a related problem that many faced (through their birth families). One participant raised the issue of medicalisation of the Trans identity. "Are you really a hijra?", is a question some have to face, as their very identity is perceived as a masquerade and as a psychological ailment. Such situations will not arise when people are educated about queer identities and gender dysphoria.

The formation of a transgender committee was also recommended as important, to discuss changes to state policy and to constantly include the special needs and experiences of the queer community in state management. The participants split into three groups following this, to put forward their own visions of Ondede in the next two decades. Among the things brought up were the immediate implementation of the state welfare policy, formation of district centers, and the need for SRS awareness and information materials in every government hospital. Free SRS was recommended (as this is already a policy in other states like Tamil Nadu). Trans people aren't allowed to get married, or to adopt children, both of which are draconian and archaic laws that deny basic rights -- this was also something everyone felt strongly about, and repeatedly brought up as something Ondede and its members should fight against.

Practical and immediate needs included housing and education (which are not accessible currently because of the social stigma Trans people face). It was also crucial, as some participants noted, that such awareness programmes included information about queer and Trans children, so that their gender expressions were protected and nurtured, instead of ridiculed and suppressed. Affirmative action for the Trans community was also a recommended as an empowering move. These measures would together then contribute towards the creation of an enabling environment for Trans and queer individuals to thrive.

Day Two

On the second day, the resource person was Ms. Jayna Kothari, founder of CLPR (Centre For Law and Policy Research), She is a lawyer at a Bangalore-based law firm and practices as a Counsel in the Karnataka High Court and the Supreme Court of India, and is also an Ondede ally. She spoke of her vision for the organisation. She noted that Ondede has been at the forefront of legal activism, and is one of the few such organisations pushing (and achieving, in the case of Section 36 (A) of the Karnataka Police Act.) legal change for the welfare of working-class Trans and queer citizens. She noted that the fight against the Indian Penal Code's Section 377 has occupied media limelight, as has queer activism led by upper-class gay and lesbian men, and that Ondede offers a different yet powerful space and politics.

This was followed by a discussion with Jayna about existing marriage laws and domestic and sexual violence prevention laws that exclude Trans people (especially Trans women, who experience high levels of violence). Jayna noted that a gender-neutral law was debated, but dismissed because victims are women overwhelmingly, and making the law gender-neutral would potentially dilute women's access to justice. Anti-sexual violence laws too, have been framed keeping in mind (cis) women, and exclude men and Trans persons. Demanding that the law be made gender-neutral, she noted, would seemingly pit Ondede and similar organisations against the women's movement. One participant suggested that instead of the laws being made gender-neutral, they are amended to include clauses that protect queer people. The rape of a Trans woman cannot be registered against IPC Section 376, which criminalises the rape of a cis woman. Jayna noted that IPC Sec 377, which criminalises unnatural sex, also isn't usually used to convict rapists. It remains a law that works by its mere existence instead of materially or directly.

There is a lot of confusion or rather, lack of clear definitions when it comes to gender in the law. Although the 2014 NALSA judgment grants trans women to the right to identify as 'women', the interpretation of Section 376 has meant that it so far has included only cis women. This was emphasised by Sana, who pointed out that many trans women refuse to accept that Section 377 applies to them, because they identify as women (as is their legal right), and 377 criminalises homosexual sex. Thus, womanhood needs to be defined in the law, and

the definition should be broadened to include feminine-identifying citizens, who are also

disproportionately victims of sexual violence. Jayna mentioned recent cases of Trans women

being classified as 'hermaphrodites' during medical tests for police officers. Clearly, medical

personnel aren't aware of various queer identities, and resort to problematic and incorrect

terminology. Despite the ban on the two-finger test, it continues to be used to 'verify' rape

claims. Jayna noted that the medical test to verify rape itself is a very problematic and

humiliating ritual that should be abandoned. Apart from medical service providers, police

officers and law enforcement also should be sensitised to Trans issues.

One participant brought the very pertinent issue of violation of privacy of trans patients when

in government hospitals. Interns and doctors crowd around them, and they're treated as

medical curiosities rather than as patients who deserve dignity and privacy. As the participants

noted, this only exacerbated the violence they had already faced. Furthermore, medical

professionals are trained to identify instances of physical violence, and not emotional or mental

trauma, which are both realities for victims of rape and sexual assault. Jagadamba, an Ondede

staff member, brought up the routine humiliation of trans rape victims by the police, which is

the biggest hindrance in reporting instances of sexual violence. The session concluded with a

discussion on various immediate strategies and campaign measures -- chief among them, an

initial meeting that would bring together women's groups and queer organisations -- to amend

IPC 376.

Conclusion of the event and final debates:

The event concluded with a feedback session from all participants, in which they spoke about what they learnt from the workshop. Everyone shared their impressions of the sessions and concluded that there was an urgent need to bring together various advocacy groups, particularly other queer activists and women's rights groups. This was crucial because pushing for legal change was a long-term process for which a united front was invaluable, particularly from other similarly vulnerable communities (for whom the law was equally problematic). Participants also highlighted the need of government support as well, particularly for rural and small-town communities. Thus, the workshop concluded with a discussion of the approach Ondede should adopt for the coming decade, an how it can handle the dual responsibility of being both empowerment and advocacy-oriented. This was noted as important especially because change was close, and Section 377 was to be discussed in the Supreme Court again in the next month.

Attendees: Day One

1. Jaya, Sahodaran

2. Tharini, Sahodaran (Pondicherry)

3. Akkai, Ondede

4. Moulali, Aptamitra

5. Elangovel, Ondede

6. Sanjeeva, Ashraya

7. Sudarshan, Ashraya

8. Amulya, Ondede

9. Abdul Majeed, Raksha Sangha

10. Akram, Raksha Sangha

11. N. Jaganath, Swatantra

12. Harish, Swatantra

13. Rakshitha, Swatantra

14. Priya, Ondede

15. M. Sana, Swatantra

16. David Selvaraj, Visthar

17. K. Srilakshmi (community member)

18. Savitha (community member)

19. Akram (community member)

20. Poojitha, Ondede

21. **Attendees: Day Two**

1. Jayna Kothari, CLPR

2. M. Sana, Swatantra

3. Jaya, Sahodaran

4. Tharini, Sahodaran

5. Poojitha, Ondede

6. Moulali, Aptamitra

7. Elengovel, Ondede

8. Sudarshan, Ashraya

9. Harish, Swatantra

10. Abdul Majeed, Raksha Sangha

11. Akram, Raksha Sangha

12. Jayashankar, Agni Raksha

13. Gangadharan

14. N. Jaganath, Swatantra

15. Sanjeeva, Ashraya

16. Rakshitha, Swatantra

17. Akkai, Ondede

18. Amulya, Ondede

19. Priya, Ondede

20. Akram, Raksha Sangha

C/O Mahaboodi Arogya Kendra seva,

1st block jayanagar, Siddapura main road,

Karnataka, Bangalore-560011

Email: ondededvs@gmail.com

https://ondede.wordpress.com/