

Liberalism in Life Competition 2006

WINNING ENTRIES

FIRST PRIZE

Madhumita Das
(LSS August Goa 2006)

SECOND PRIZE

Rommani Sen
(ISPP Delhi, 2006)

THIRD PRIZE

Abhishek Bondia
(LSS Delhi September 2006)

&

Akansha Thakore
(CFW 2006)

Details on Life in Liberalism Entries 2006

S.No	Entry By	Number of Entries	Seminar
1.	Rommani Sen	2	ISPP 2006
2.	Deopriya Aggarwal	1	Kolkata LSS 2006
3.	Amritha V	1	Cochin LSS 2006
4.	Gargi Iyengar	1	CFW 2006
5	Abhishek Bondia	1	Delhi LSS 2006
6	Madhumita Das	1	Goa LSS 2006
7	Nishtha Singhal	1	ISPP & CFW 2006
8	Isha Jolly	1	Delhi LSS 2006
9	Sandip Kumar	3	LACS 2005
10	Pranav sachdev	1	CFW 2006
11	Sanwar Mat Jal	1	Jaipur LSS 2006
12.	Mukesh Kumar	1	LSS 2005
13.	Akansha Thakore	1	CFW 2006
14.	Megha Aggarwal	1	LSS Delhi 2004 & AES 2005
15.	Aishwarya Shankar	1	LSS Trivandrum 2004

Liberalism in Life Competition 2006 Entries

Madhumita Das (First Prize Winner)

I had heard this term somewhere - Karmic Amnesia. It implied, roughly that all that there is to know is known to us, it is within us, because WE ARE IT. It's just that, being subject to conditioning from the moment of our birth, we have forgotten it. It lies buried somewhere. Therefore, all knowledge is not learning. It is merely re-membering. Yes, yes, big words (sic)! Fancy thoughts! I had never cared to find out more about the people who propounded this thought, or about the sanctity of the thought itself. But through the years, knowingly and unknowingly I have carried this idea with me.

Post LSS and ALCS, I think I can begin to understand what it is about. Nothing has felt so right or so true till now! More than enthusiasm about tumbling across a whole lot of truth, I feel a peace within myself. In the jamboree and illusion of our life and times, I know that I am not even close in making sense of the madness, but I feel and therefore I know, that the Philosophy of Liberty is true. It is a constant.

Perhaps I am unable to put across how life has been post LSS. So let me go into little specifics. Some incidents, some insights, which have made me happy and caused me to grow. Here I would like you to know that, more than the possibilities of setting right the outside world (which obviously is breathtaking), liberalism has helped me to straighten up my own crumpled self. I think nothing could be more meaningful to me than this. So here goes.

SITTING WITH MY FEET UP: I have a problem. I cannot sit like a lady for long. I just have to put my feet up and sit cross legged, or any other way and then I am set. Did I say that this was my problem? Well it is not. I am perfectly fine with this fine print of mine. People around me are not. It is their problem. As long as it upsets people I care for, then it becomes my problem.

Friends in movie halls, parents in restaurants, they all keep nudging me to stop being a kid, give up my bohemian ways (wow! what was that?! even I thought so!) In school my teachers informed me this trait came in way of me being selected as the school captain. In college, the poor professors cannot say anything but pass disgusted glances, like I should not be there. While walking around the class giving lectures, they stop short of coming to the row in which I sit and so on. On my way to LSS my co passenger in the flight was distinctly discomfited and kept turning the other way round !

Big deal, you would say. I would say too. But during LSS, something happened. Through the four days, I was listening, talking and mind gym-ing like never before. I felt alive and involved for once. And whenever I wanted, I put my feet up on the chair.

The only difference being, I didn't feel an iota of apprehension doing so. While at other times I have to make do with my 'I could care less attitude', here that was not a consideration at all. I felt rather that these were a bunch of honest people. People who talk of liberalism of thought and action, such people, such a society will not judge me on the way I appear. They will respect me or disrespect me on the basis of my intrinsic worth. They wouldn't draw inferences about my bearing, my background et al, on the basis of how I sit. It was not even a gesture on anybody's part, a non issue really. While I do know, that I can't sit cross legged my way through life, and of course there are pretty reasonable things like decorum, for once, I felt liberated!

TICKET TO FREEDOM: I was 19 years and a few months when I attended LSS (Goa). This was the first time that I traveled out of home somewhere, on my own, for my own self. Obviously, LSS would be happening in Kolkata after a few months and I could have attended that, but I wanted to go. And in all my life, reasons for my NOT going had never been so potent or so it would seem. I'll explain.

Life was majorly screwed up. I had helped Mom (lets call her M) to leave home, take a divorce, make up her mind and remarry. I did all of this because I felt, or rather I believed till then that M had sacrificed enough of her life for we kids (my brother in the 9th grade and me) and now it was our turn to give her back her lost years. I felt obliged. Her apprehensions all her life was what would happen to us, we needed to be taken care of, to be grown up. Now living with My Dad and Bro, I felt myself to be the new Mom. It was my turn to think of what would happen to my Bro, that I need to grow him up, that it was my turn to sacrifice.

While the larger question of me leaving town for higher studies after graduation and why I shouldn't leave my family alone loomed in the background, more immediately it was going to LSS. It was on the 24th of August. M had left on the 9th. Going by the values on which I grew up, I shouldn't have left a ruffled Dad and a vulnerable Bro on their own so early on. I thought I'd die of guilt. But still some part of me was adamant and I landed up in a seminar hall with a 360 degree view of the sun, sand and sky!

As the days progressed, we got introduced to diverse things. How privatization can help curb pollution, poaching, traffic, water scarcity, how it can enable me and the rickshaw puller earn to our satisfaction and abilities and the like. It was never said to explicitly. But everything told me, it was right and just that I came here for myself. It would take some more time for me to discover the larger lessons from what I had absorbed in these four days. These I'll tell you in the other episodes. As of then I remember zooming down the highways past the beaches behind the bikes of my newly made friends in the dead of the night. Having the time of my life. I was thinking, "Wont Bro be happy that I am happy? Isn't me being away from him and happy more preferable to him than me hanging about his neck, cranky, domineering and doing my 'duty'? I was not guilty.

What I had till then just told my self, would be my ticket to freedom, had in REALITY become my ticket to freedom!

CENTRE OF GRAVITY: Of all that I had picked up at LSS, the power point presentation of the philosophy of liberty has remained etched within me. Every now and then, whenever I am lost, and I would rather pop a pill and go to sleep, I instead open the LACS reader and read Ken Schooland. "You own your life. To deny this is to imply that another person has a higher claim on your life than you have." No book, person, spiritual leader or friend has ever said it so clearly.

It was the third night of LSS I guess, that I was going through these lines again over dinner that I conjured up something called the centre of gravity concept. It made sense. It went like this ' If you tend to place your own centre of gravity in other people's person's, chances are, you will topple over all the time.'

More than the implications this had for life in general, it cleared up my head for another issue which was killing me. A very nice person, one of the very few completely self sufficient individuals I had come across, who was also my boyfriend (lets call him V) had forcibly taken himself out of my life. In short we had broken up. Just then. And I was really broken. It was like denying me my food and water. When I articulated the centre of gravity business it dawned upon me like lightning - what was I doing? I had taken myself out and placed me within him, thus I was all toppled over. He never did that, with anyone. His centre of gravity was so deep within him; you couldn't pull it out with all your might.

If I admired him for what he was, how could I be so despicable? To my self. More than I owed it to myself that he come back; I owed it to myself to bring my own self back from V's person. Become more than mechanical flesh and bones. Only then could I admire myself and even hope to be admired by V.

It's been seven months since, and I still think V is the best. But I think, for me, I am better. I love myself and after a fair amount of practice I am learning not to wear my heart on my sleeve. It is my property, in Ken Schoolland's words! It is absurd to put my property up for anybody's reckoning.

I am careful to distinguish and weigh these thoughts against the craziness that people my age routinely indulge in. I think this is more lasting. It is one of the very few things that I hardly ever doubt. I am happy!

METHOD TO MADNESS: Ever since I was back from LSS, life was somewhat simpler. What I saw with my eyes were not that hazy to comprehend. All scenes were scrubbed clean, like after a monsoon shower. Sometimes it put me at ease. Like the smart street kids selling gum and balloons outside the malls, my maid negotiating her salary, or the laundry guy passing on his newly acquired Reliance cell phone number, to pick up laundry on call! Sometimes it made me sick. The clerks in my UGC sponsored 5 star rated university, who'd take two months to pass a sheaf of paper around, the police man who refused to help me while the eve teaser took off laughing, or when my maid couldn't get her son operated because a local Congress leader had promised to recommend her case to the nursing home and then backed out.

There is a method to this madness, and like everybody else, I too am a part of it. Still. It doesn't exactly kill me, except for sometimes. One such time was when I was covering the visit of Minister for Panchayati Raj, Youth Affairs and Sports, Mani Shankar Aiyar at a Seminar organized by the Netaji Research Bureau in honor of the brothers Subhash Bose and Sarat Bose. This was for the newspaper I work with. This was a month after LSS. As an erudite, smart, quick thinking and pro active minister, I was rather looking forward to hear him speak on 'Economic Policies for a Democratic Polity.'

After sufficiently complaining about his change of portfolio, he went on to rubbish the 1991 reforms saying that they had led to the further fragmentation of our democratic polity. "Had we held on to planning and sustained our Hindu Rate of Growth (3%), we would today be growing at a rate of 15- 17 % and not the currently celebrated 9%," he said. He had solutions, oh yes he did! When he was the petroleum minister, it was disinvestment, now he did not hesitate to declare that the master key to ending all poverty and distress in the country lay in strengthening the Panchayati system. Nothing else would do.

Which was all fine, but I was sufficiently disgusted. I called up the Assistant Editor under whom I work and shared my thoughts with her. 'Chameleon, opportunistic, would make a better businessman than a politician, wily et al.'

She asked me to cool down and get used to the game. They were all like this, she said, these ministers. That is how their political education goes. The famed brother of the founder of Swaminomics was probably saying this to honor the left of centre thoughts of the Bose brothers, perhaps he didn't mean a thing, she explained. Later over tea, when I got a chance I asked Mr Aiyar to please explain how only Panchayati Raj would help solve everything. "There is a method to everything, my dear," he smiled graciously. "Yeah right," I thought. "Now I know that there is indeed a method to this madness. To the excesses and inadequacies I see everywhere."

Now these are things we read about in books and newspapers all the time. Seeing it unfold in front of your eyes is another thing. I was infuriated. But only for a while. It just made my resolve stronger. I shall continue to pursue journalism; I shall work among these very people, but towards my own end. I wrote a particularly caustic review of his lecture, sufficient to make the lamest of reader see through the double standards and subtle enough not to be downright revolting. My editor did not think so. It got published all watered down. I was writing a feature article, she educated. Lashing out wasn't required here. "Fine," I thought. "Its going to take some time, but I wont run away. I'll figure out a method to this madness as well!"

SINGUR: I am sure all of you know what is happening in my state- West Bengal. The SEZ issue is all flared up. The left government has an understanding with the industrialists. They want to hand over as much land as possible. The right wing opposition says, "Over my dead body" but refuses to die! Even more appalling, the anti left students organizations in the City all demand that the SEZ idea be shelved immediately. They have reduced the whole exercise to one of snatching away of farmer's lands, period. People are writing, saying various things, some demand transparency in the dealings, some demand better compensation by the government, others think that the Government is the best thing to have happened to Bengal in many years and these Anti SEZ student bodies should just go take a hike.

In December, just before I left for ALCS, I was asked by the paper to write a story about how the Student movement is shaping up. I went about reporting all that I saw and found out. All the acquisitions, reasons, plans, I put in everything. Personally, I found it revolting, but still my job is to report what I see, and that I did.

A few days later, the paper called up to say that they cannot run the story. It has too many things against the Chief Minister, I am told. "It goes against our official policy of being anti left parties but pro CM on this issue," they said.

I was appalled. While I always knew, that decorum of this sort was followed, I heard it from the Horse's mouth now. In clear terms. This was a free newspaper practicing self censorship, for whatever reasons. I started recommending something that had been on my mind for long. "Fine, we drop it. But cant we work upon something which asks why is the government interfering between two private parties - the farmers and the industrialists in the first place? This is not the way it happens in Andhra Pradesh. Cant we ask why is everyone- the Tata's, the Farmers, happy that the Government pimping the deal at all?"

I was asked to clear my head. You don't just naively ask such things, I was taught. Yes, I do understand that one doesn't go on asking such things out of the blue. A 20 year freelance journalist is certainly not adequately disposed to write a commentary or editorial to this effect. But what of the people who can ask this question in this medium? Why are they not stirring? Of course there is a method to this madness as well, it dawned upon me. Vested interests, here, there, everywhere. I weighed my options - selling the story to another house. Starting a campaign on my own, talking about it

I considered hard and decided (to the chagrin of my more fiery side) that my time wasn't now. At another time, I would strike, when the iron was hot. Then I would not have any doubts. I listened to my cautious side for once and put all of Singur behind me. It would take its own course. Still, a part of me keeps on saying, I should not have given up. I wish to carry this shrieking voice with me all the way, till I can put it down for good.

While this wasn't a consolation, it certainly made me happy, that the Paper agreed to let me write an article on the growing support for the legalization of Marijuana in the city. I had to work it out in the lamest manner possible, not giving the editors a chance to snip and cut, and it did get published with very few changes!

MAYAPUR: Mayapur is a little town / village 200 kms from Kolkata. The International Society of Krishna Conciousness (ISKCON) is head quartered here. I happened to visit the place with my family a few days back, in the thick of spring. True to its name, the place envelopes you in its MAYA ! Numerous huge temples, museums, and the most beautiful gardens I have ever seen. There are flashes of my stay over there, scenes which keep coming back every time I close my eyes.

The main lotus temple. Done up in the most expensive marble, mosaic, gold, gems, possible, it is a wonder not just for all the excesses it is made of, but of the simple, naive charm that it embodies.

Every evening, a grand Arati at the main temple is undertaken. The altar is a huge raised platform, curtained in the most luxurious silk. The curtains are raised sharp at 7 in the evening. I was there to witness it. The curtains give way to these larger than life idols of Krishna, Radharani, and the Gopi's. They were dressed in the finest of fabrics, diamonds, pearls and gold. All so tastefully done. And the garlands. OMG !!! They were huge, must be a thousand roses on Krishna himself. Flowers, flowers, everywhere! The place was dripping with affluence. And in the midst of it all, happy balded sanyasis, Indian and Foreigners, chanting away the name of the lord for all they are worth.

Now I am not a believer as such. I just like to see everything as it happens. Mayapur was not a revelation. It was a confirmation. There were excesses everywhere, yet there was enough for all. Money is not looked upon with scorn there. All things beautiful are admired. The Government has no part to play in this system which feeds thousands of hungry daily and have educated tens of thousands of poor children till now. I was wondering how, inspite of these Lakhs of flowers being used for the Puja's everyday, the place was still brimming with flowers. The head Swamiji of Mayapur Dham explained to me - "these flowers are eager to be put to the service of Lord Krishna. They want to bloom. Hence there is always plenty."

While this does not have even a distant correlation to what I learnt at LSS and ALCS, I was happy to see a self contained system function so beautifully in the absence of a Government!

SELFISH IS GOOD: This was the biggest, most painful and most important lesson I have learnt / re-learnt ever. That our long held beliefs can be intrinsically wrong. And that Selfish is as honest as you can get.

Ma had gone away in August. By October, she had made her mind to leave her new life and come back to her kids. We had her stay on, but she did not put up much long. In November, she came back/ we brought her back. A mess of her life and ours. I was the only one who had been party to everything in her life. I backed her up all the way. I always assumed, because she is in pain, she is right. Never thought beyond that. Thus played hand in glove to the numerous mistakes that we have committed over time.

I say we had taken wrong steps, because if we had not taken wrong steps, we would not have ended up the way we are. Now, when things were dawning slowly, I needed to ask myself - was I blind? Couldn't I see what I was doing? On poring into myself further I found a clue.

Ever since I can remember, I have come to fear the word 'Selfish', I had it used upon me so many times and in so many issues / non issues that I had sort of developed a phobia. That is why I had sided with M in her rollercoaster journey. Because I dared not raise my voice (even to myself) for fear of being called Selfish. In the trade off, I now realize, I committed so many follies. Just to escape the tag. If I had truly loved M, I would have seen things with open eyes and told her where she went wrong, and what I thought was good or bad for her. But I was too busy being good, being an angel. I traded my own self, for a label.

This is not to refute that people should be left alone to decide what is best for them. If I would have done that, there would still be some consolation. I did not; I had played an active part in everything.

Gradually I realize, and I feel so sorry for M. Wish she had realized what I am realizing now. That taking care of oneself is the primary responsibility of an individual. Had she done that, she would not have been discontented from the very beginning. Had I done that, I would have told her, that I did not want her to go. We were busy fooling ourselves in our garb of responsibility towards the world and its cousin.

"The affirmation of one's own life, happiness, growth, freedom is rooted in one's capacity to love. i.e. care, respect, responsibility, knowledge. If an individual is able to love productively, he loves himself too. If he can love only others, he cannot love at all." Erich Fromm.

We have come too far to set things back. We are trying. But I have time on my side. I shall not sit back to do my 'duty' towards M, Dad or Bro, if my inner self revolts against such proposition. I shall make myself happy, so that they do not have to take care of me. And I shall want my brother to seek his own happiness. It is a perfect system. The only true basis existence I feel.

I do not fear 'Selfish' anymore. It is as honest as you can get.

'I' IS SACRED

Of course at CCS everyone will remember Ayn Rand's saying. "The smallest minority on earth is the individual."

On my way back from ALCS, I started on The Fountainhead. My first Rand reading. It was a home coming of sorts. At the risk of exaggerations, will say that I found my Ex boyfriend - V, in the likeness of Howard Roark. Of course I'm not being accurate. But something likes it. The entire book was a re-membering. It felt so natural.

I am more alive now than I have ever been. Because obviously I am precious. Full of capacity. A lot of things are waiting to happen. I will do them at my own behest. Not under the baggage of impression, expectation or resolution. I am far from finding my route map, on which I shall move ahead. But my senses are more alert than ever. The only thing I owe in the world is honesty. To my self. There might be times when I turn back and say that so and so of what I did was wrong in the long run. But I wouldn't like to repent for them or for anything ever.

"I" is / am sacred. This thought is the wind beneath my wings. I can't tell CSS how ecstatic I am that our interests converged and I found myself.

Rommani Sen (ISPP 2006, Second Prize winner, CD)

Abhishek Bondia (LSS Delhi 2006, Third Prize winner)

There are always thoughts, but seldom there are actions
People often criticize but rarely do they do the right
We all care, but we just forget to act.

Confirming the above facts, I was also lacking a platform to convert my thoughts into actions. LSS brought actions to my thoughts. I got to know how to use mediums such as the press to advocate for issues that I am really passionate about.

Social issues regarding healthcare and education, are the ones that I am most concerned about. CCS gave me the opportunity to work towards both of them. For healthcare, I started working towards a fellowship paper that explores the negligent attitude of regulation for pathological laboratories. My views also got published in the Times of India.

For education, I am aiming to work towards the education choice campaign. Here I intend to be a catalyst in achieving the goals laid down. Also, based on the over-arching philosophy shared at LSS (that of self-reliance and reduced government dependence) I have currently designed a one dollar school for computer aided learning in schools for the underprivileged children. I seek to achieve my goals by both advocacy and making case examples of real-time execution.

As I move ahead in my career, I see that contributing to society will be a critical part of my goals. To sum up – I am investing in society so that in turn society is ABLE to invest in me. Thanks to LSS for showing the investment route.

Akanksha Thakore (CFW 2006, Third Prize Winner)

What began as the promise of an enriching learning experience went on to be much more than that. 'Communicating Freedom Workshop' for me, was more than a capacity-building programme. It was a phenomenon; an event that left me not just with invaluable skills, but with inspiration to last a lifetime.

It left in its wake hope and passion, and dreams of an empowered India. It gave me a role to play in reinvigorating civil society – by empowering me to create that role in the first place. Count in those tiny things that go into making a memorable event – late night conversations over ideas, sincere gestures by faculty members, and an amazing vibe shared by all the participants.

Not wanting to dilute the experience by trying to hunt for words in which it would fit, I present to you a piece that was composed during the closing ceremony of the workshop – to be recited as an expression of what the five days meant to me.

Brief moments...fleeting glimpses...impressions that last,
Days that you wish would stretch forever, yet they pass by oh-so-fast.
Having come with empty hands, I return with more than my fill
Curiosity and eagerness now replaced with an indescribable thrill!

Yes I go back with a lot of things; I take back a lot from here
Beginning with a quiet resolve that's devoid of any fear.
Mere strangers a few days back – people who're now a part of me
I take back a memorable movie; each one has a part to play you see!

I take back Anuj's gentleness, Sukhi's humour, Ritika's élan,
Prabhjot's dancing eyes, Deepak's innocence and passionate gyaan.
Neshwin's mischief, Adi's music, Swati's poetry and Neha's goodwill.
Prashamsa's charm, Pinky's simplicity, Rageshree's voice for which I could kill.

I take back Naro's naughty pranks, Gargi's giggles, Nishtha's unabashed praise
Anuj's passion and goodness, Vaani's warmth that leaves me in a daze.
Ajay's andaaz, Pranav ka prabhaav, Deepika ka aatmavishwaas,
Sujatha's immense perspective, uski Hindi jisme hai kuch khaas!

I do take back Parth's questions, Swati's infectious enthu and cheer!
Mana's crazy ideas and warm hugs that make her very very dear.
Etched in my memory are those 5 o'clock conversations that seemed to have no end
I take back a new-found connection – Anand, in whom I see a lifelong friend.

I return with a barrier broken – having stayed away from sleep.
Learning that has transformed, stirred something very deep,
Sessions that have inspired, given ample food for thought.
Immense clarity, strong conviction, unshakeable faith I've got.

Rediscovered passion, reignited mind
Connections that liberate, and not bind
I take back memories for eternity
But most of all I take back an awakened me!

And that's not about it. CFW, like I said, was the beginning of a lot many things. CCS has a way of springing forth ideas that refuse to let go off you – I'm still dabbling with a lot of them. The

influences these ideas have had on me have been profound, and yet they show up in subtle ways. They show up in unexpected circumstances, making me smile back at where I'd first been introduced to them.

One recent example is the Group Discussion – Interview process that I'm going through for an admission into a top B-School. Across topics – be it economics, politics, culture or the individual human itself, the kind of perspective I bring in has managed to raise many an eyebrow. At one GD, the participants were intrigued on hearing concepts that I've brought back from CCS events – 'principle of subsidiarity', 'principles of sound public policy', and so on. These have elevated the level of discussions, apart from planting ideas in new minds. The panelists themselves don't seem to be expecting me to have such a holistic understanding of how the entire free-market principle or that of individual liberty actually works – and in areas never thought of before. It's good to surprise people like that at times...

Needless to say, CCS has been on my mind more often than not even as I approach my academic career. In fact, I'm convinced that all budding managers must go through an LSS! After all, they'd be key players in India's budding economy a few years down the line...and we need to spread the bug, remember?! ☺

That brings me to my commitment - in getting the world infected with ideas of liberty. I confess to not having done even a fraction of what I can, and want to do towards this end. Or may be I'm discounting the medium that I'm using. Perhaps, CCS hasn't seen me in action as far as actual projects are concerned. But as anyone who has been around me for the last few months – in fact even those who I've met only once would testify – they have all been given a one-time dose of what CCS is, does, and envisions. From my ex-college profs to my fellow candidates to the IIM faculty members – it takes just a tiny prompting to get me started. And then, there's no looking back. They can feel the passion. They can see the fire in my eyes. They can sense the resolve in my voice. And they know that it's not a dream that's built in the air. There's something revolutionary brewing here...someday, they will trace it to Hauz Khas, Delhi ☺

It's not that I'm only an ideas person – devoid of any action. Given the stage I am at – building my life piece by piece, finding meaning and direction, thinking, questioning, seeking – it's only a matter of time before you see me plunge headlong in... clichéd, but apt – you can take me out of CCS, but you can't take CCS out of me!

Whatever the shape I give to my life, whatever the direction I choose for myself, my purpose will always be driven by the collective vision that we all see today – the creation of a civil society – the re-emergence of a society built on principles of liberty, peace, and justice. And to that effect, I'm committed to this cause – in thought and action. Thank you CCS. Life has never been the same again.

Isha Jolly (Delhi LSS 2006)

It was a matter of great privilege and honor for me to be a part of the Liberty & Society Seminar. I was really fortunate to be at a place where the new policy makers (the young minds) were trying to bring a reform in the society.

I expected LSS to enhance my knowledge and understanding over the various problems and public policies but in addition to it, LSS has actually given me a new direction, a new approach, a new platform to advocate my views over issues which needs to be tackled immediately. It won't be a justice if I don't mention here that these four days have given me an experience of lifetime. It was a perfect blend of diverse cultures, thoughts, ideas and opinions, which came together to reconstruct a new vision of the society.

The sessions I attended, brought out the fact that freedom means equal restraints on all, especially on those who are there to enforce the law (Government). It highlighted that the value of

freedom is above democracy and any other thing, which the system offers. It also helped me to break the stereotypes regarding the homosexuals, muslim relation with terrorism etc.

I realized that no matter how educated and knowledgeable we are, at one point of time, we all are bound to be stereotype about something or the other. Additionally, it recommended the changing of the educational scenario of the country by reforming the course of funding through vouchers, scholarships, loans and also abolish the licensing system to start the schools. Though the sessions were quite exhaustive and rigorous but the interest level was never the less. Every one was enthusiastic about being a policy and a change maker. I feel that this seminar contributed a lot in making my thinking progressive and rising above the preconceived ideas about various issues. It stressed on restricting the role of government and was Pro-Individualism. It's high time that the youth struggles for the second freedom and exercise restraint on every body. I would like to conclude by quoting the words of William Allen White

"Liberty is the only thing you can't have it, unless you give it to others."

Pranav Sachdeva (CFW 2006)

Someone once said the difference between hard work and success is enthusiasm. And that is what I gained at CFW and LACS. "Duniya badalne ja rahe hain," as Swati put it, did have an impact on my attitude. Plus it was the skills that I gained in the workshop that has made some difference which is already being felt in the works I do.

First of all, I hoped to do much more than what I have done after CFW. It's not been upto expectations due to preoccupation with studies. But the satisfaction comes from doing much more than I was doing before the workshop. I hope you understood the point. The skills that I gained were useful in deepening understanding of the workings of the non-governmental sector, crossing communication barriers and how private initiatives can transform the country/world.

Secondly, the focus of CCS is on liberty which I understand and have imbibed in me. But in the kind of initiatives we (my friends and I) take, we do not exactly propagate liberty or economic freedom as a concept. Still, and it's very important, we promote liberal ideas through our conduct and attitude. I changed myself, we changed, our families changed, our relatives changed, our other friends changed, our peers and colleagues changed etc. etc. So it's all very subtle and gradual, I think that is the only way. Yes we talk about free market when the discussion goes in that direction with whoever it maybe (including Medha Patkar).

Finally, we focussed ourselves on youth, taking a cue from CCS. We targeted children of different slums in Delhi. We organised competitions, distributed prizes, met a lot of people, and basically "reached out" as we say. This is done under an umbrella association called YUVA-RDB. In the last few events, we focussed specifically on Muslim-majority areas like Jama Masjid and Inderlok. It was awesome but chaotic. And to have better interaction, we launched our Hindi newsletter 'Mitr'. This was distributed to the youth and elders of that area. We also put some questions at the back of it, so that they can answer and we can make a re-visit to collect them back and again distribute prizes for best answers. The newsletter boldly said: Shubh Deepawli and Eid-Mubarak. The whole affair cost a lot in terms of money but had some impact of reaching out "beyond mini-borders".

I also got involved in Child Labour project as part of legal-aid society of my law college. We concentrated on Seelampur (again a Muslim-majority area, again focus on children), did field visits, interacted with officials from labour and child welfare departments, socialised with people, sensitized them, gave legal-aid, did a play and tried to promote education and school enrolment.

Plus, the use of media that I have been doing to provoke debate and to deepen moderate ideas, goes on as it was. CFW and LACS were wonderful and I hope to be associated with CCS and its issues for time to come.

Gargi Iyengar (CFW 2006)

My first trip to Delhi – mixed emotions, a new place, new people and a program that for sure would change the way I would think and act - the presentations, the brain storming sessions, and (Woah!) the late night arguments and discussions. CFW urged me to think about things I had never given a thought to. I got to bond with different minds who are amazing friends now.

It was indeed a wonderful time we spent together - chahe woh chai ho yah coffee, over the dinner table or the conference room; it was that exuberance and excitement that kept me going... Autocracy or democracy - it was a bundle of straws which made it so easy. Compiling our goals and suggestions was an activity that called for being together and putting the essence of 25 different brains to make a difference to the world, to our country, and also to the person next to you.

CCS calls it the power of ideas. This makes a lot of difference in witnessing and experiencing it. CFW is a lot different from just reading it. It helped me understand society and economy. The documentary screening on livelihood gave me a very different view on life.

Every session (one that comes to my mind at the moment is the 'Beyond Borders' one) kept me going - thinking, questioning myself...sometimes there was a complete overhaul of ideas that existed in my head after the CFW.

CFW wasn't a bundle of lectures but interactive with hyperactive participants exuding energy the whole day

The presentation skills have helped me a lot in giving better and effective presentations in college; discuss the importance of liberty with my friends and the impact of challenging policy issues, how youth who are the change agents can make this society a much more harmonious place to live in.

I can go on and on, but to sum up - CFW gave me a kick to think hatke on various public policy issues and come back to my city with new refreshing ideas to share and discuss.

Nishtha Singhal (ISPP & CFW 2006)

CFW 2006, held in the last week of July was a meeting point for minds that wanted to devise strategies to use their time constructively and take steps towards positive social change. Engaging with paradigms of team work, leadership and delegation, the participants realized that there are no perfect answers, only perfect intentions. If there exists the will to make a difference, resources such as volunteers, funds, support and guidance all fall in place one after the other. A big dream, a clear vision and a fair idea of the mission are all one needs to begin on the journey!

Personally, CFW introduced me to avenues that can be explored when one is embarking on a project for social change. The leadership and team building exercises were not only great fun, but practical and meaningful. CFW is a unique way to learn and experiment among peers and also to meet future colleagues and friends.

Aishwarya Shankar (LSS Trivandrum 2004)

"The impact of CCS on my career had been greater than I have ever imagined. I was a final-year Physics student at a college in Trichy when I attended the LSS at Trivandrum a couple of years ago. An out-and-out science student, I absolutely had zero knowledge about Economics and Political Science. But my exposure to the host of seminars has changed my entire perspective of

things that I had so far taken for granted. And the follow-ups of the seminar were in the form of discussions with my classmates.

With the involvement reaching the heights, all I could do was to drop my idea of mastering in physics. I decided to take up journalism as my career, pursuing my masters in journalism at Asian College of Journalism (Of course getting through the entrance examination of this prestigious institution was also partly because of my social perspective that was tuned after LSS). Now working as a reporter with The Hindu in Trichy, my "post-LSS ideologies are having a positive influence" on my writings, a feedback from my Chief of Bureau.

Megha Aggarwal (LSS Delhi 2004 & AES 2005)

Life is a competition because in such a short span, one wants to achieve so much and explore everything through five senses. Liberalism in life was the first thing I desired to achieve after reading 'Fountain head' by Ayn Rand.

The author from my perspective, "Liberalism" is defined as the tool to find solutions to the Porter's five forces model

Liberalism is Liberty
Liberalism is Life
Liberalism is The Pursuit of Happiness
Liberalism is Success
Liberalism is Spirituality

Liberalism is Liberty: It is the guiding force for the inner soul. Liberalism is the true feeling, which encourages an individual to fight for his/her basic rights. It opens new gates for freedom of speech and raise voice against any form of injustice. The right to information is the tool for liberalists to pursue education and use it a medium to communicate and improve for betterment of humanity I followed the same steps of collecting information, analyzing it and then drawing strong implications from simple facts and figures, to gain expertise in my career of research in the knowledge industry.

Liberalism is Life: Life is the fight against fear of death. It is accepting the right for joyous living and equal opportunities for all the citizens of a nation. Without the strong support of physical and mental wellbeing of all, no country can develop or progress and fight against mass diseases, and social issues of unemployment, communal riots

Liberalism is The Pursuit of Happiness: Happiness is not just the feeling of one's own success and achievements. Moreover it is the rational feeling for the betterment of all. As rightly quoted by Albert Schweitzer that success is not the key to happiness but happiness is the key to success. On the other hand, unhappiness is simply the gap between the expectations and the results. Liberals believe in equal opportunities to rise above our social status. And Liberals believe each and every family should have an equal opportunity to make this world better for their children.

Liberalism is Success: Emily Dickinson wrote that

"Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple host
Who took the flag to-day
Can tell the definition,
So clear, of victory!

As he, defeated, dying,
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear!"

I would strongly differ from this perspective because I feel success is the benchmark. An individual is successful when compared to the set benchmarks. And those standing in the row to taste success, look up to the ones in limelight for achieving big in respective fields. Liberalism is the feeling that respects others success and feels delighted for all.

Liberalism is Spirituality: Spirituality is like a dream and illusion that we are asleep in, and that the goal of life is to awake to our real Self (One, which is mystery and whose essence can hardly be understood, therefore given names like Eternal wisdom). The spiritual journey of a libertarian is to interpret and appreciate the true meaning of this unique life

For "where there is a will , there is a way", and so I applied for Liberty and Society Seminar in 2005. The journey began to explore the dynamics of liberty and life. Its been two years and I have gained so much from the experience and feel strongly have imbibed the true values which is the only defense of our liberties.

Liberalism is the ideology that strives to defend freedom for everyone.

Amritha V (Cochin LSS 2006)

- ❖ Has it helped you to look at your place in society differently? :At times
 - ❖ Has It impacted on your choice of career Or course? : I would now surely go for IPR
 - ❖ Do you look at things that you neglected Earlier ? : YES I DO
 - ❖ Do You have different conversations with friends and teachers?: NO
 - ❖ Did you try to change things around you in your own small and big way ? : NO
 - ❖ Do you think that things can be changed?
 - ❖ What kind of follow up have you done or do you want to do with CCS in future?
- *THERE ARE MANT THINGS WHICH I WANT TO CHANGE BUT I DON'T KNOW. HOW EXACTLLY CAN YOU PLZ HELP*