

## In Search of a Purposeful Life...

Today, the dominant culture in youth is propelled by consumerism. One can see its manifestations in every aspect of life, write from the choice of education and career path to the choice of a life partner. The utility of everything is determined by the fetish for never-ending 'enrichment of the self'. Nevertheless, the idea of the self is a product of prevailing social constructs. It necessarily kills the real self and keeps the consumer.

As far as India is concerned, with its humongous number of youth, what kind of ideas, values, criteria's shape the life of youngsters is a deciding factor in shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> century India. Youth is defined by their refreshing ideas, vibrancy, courage, fervour for change, passion for a righteous cause, and outrage against injustice. But the prevailing system produces youth exactly antithetical to above-mentioned qualities. Further issues like unemployment, loneliness, skill-vocation mismatch, overuse of social media, are making youth directionless/purposeless. Many may differ but the picture is bleak.

One can, like many passive often do, discuss it, criticize it and let the status quo prevail. Or one can, like Active Few, go against the flow and upset the established order.

मैं गोताखोर, मुझे गहरे जाना होगा,  
तुम तट पर बैठ भंवर की बातें किया करो।

Here is the story of one such गोताखोर, who has broken the shackles of popular norms through her actions and chalked the alternative definition of success.

Aditi Pidurkar, a young girl from a small village near Chandrapur. She received her degree in electrical engineering from Nagpur University. She was among the toppers, and that easily got her a job in a multinational technology company, without her searching for one.

Everything was set - big salary, urban lifestyle, and corporate work culture. But her inner voice was forcing her to be unsatisfied in this so called picture-perfect scenario. Since her childhood, she had been seeing children from vulnerable sections of society in an ashram school near her home. They were unable to get a better education merely because of their financial conditions. She always wanted to do something for them. She used to think, earning good income and spending in the form of charity as one way to help.

Meanwhile, she was introduced to [NIRMAN](#) – a youth initiative to identify, nurture and organize young changemakers. There she realized it's not financial capital that is scarce in social work, but primarily it is the human capital. Further, she also felt that her skills and creativity were better utilized to help those in need instead of being used to add to the profits of a giant corporation to make the top 1% richer. She realized money can't buy freedom. She had two roads ahead in front of her - one to keep on with the job at the multinational company or another to pursue her interest in the education sector. She took the one less travelled by!

When she left the job, her friends and family were worried about her future. Initially, they opposed her decision but eventually she could convince them of her genuine concerns. Her father supported her all along.



Aditi's interest in education intersected with NIRMAN's motto of nurturing budding social changemakers. It's now already been one year since she started working with NIRMAN. As a member of the NIRMAN Team, she is responsible for content development including videos, graphics, photos, writing articles, case studies, and preparing educational material. If social media is the (black) mirror of the youth culture today as it is flooded by the projection of prosthetic dreams, filtered selfies, manufactured choices, then she is trying to put a counter-narrative using the very medium through NIRMAN's web presence.

On the larger front, she is working on positive psychology and the ways in which it relates to NIRMAN's process of youth development. Unlike clinical psychology, positive psychology has not yet become part of general lexicon. Clinical psychology deals with mental distress, anxiety, depression, etc. So to say it attempts to bring mental health status from negative to zero. While positive psychology works in order to push it further from zero onwards on the positive side. It is basically a scientific study of what makes life worth living. Unfortunately 'Eat – Sleep - Earn - Repeat' has become the way of living for many. Life happens for many as a product of the accident called birth. 'Why' of living has been left behind in the rat race. Thus, a critical feature of youth flourishing does involve identification of a worthwhile purpose for one's life.

Among other aspects, contribution to society plays an important role in positive psychology. Aditi is working on this front. She believes personal-career life and social life should be bridged. Ways to make one's education, skill set socially relevant can give oneself a purpose. Unfortunately, the prevalent education system and job market hardly give such a chance or encourage the search for it. Aditi takes it as a challenge to make it visible to the youngsters the differentiation between goals in the system (degree, post-graduation etc.), goals of the system (expansion of the institution, income maximization, a supply of required human resource for the market) and personal goals that make one's life meaningful. For most youth, first two goals dominate and direct individual's decision making. While the third part gets succumbed to former ones, it gets moulded accordingly; and false perception of self-goals is born out of it, driven primarily by the targets prescribed by job ladder and materialistic pursuits. It's a task to facilitate young people to be able to think beyond these constraints.



Aditi herself leads by example to provide an alternative. She has not let her system-given narrow identity of an engineer cloud her decision-making or dictate the terms on which she wants to live. She works here in NIRMAN with the theme - 'rise with all' contrary to what she was taught in the corporate world - 'rise above all'.

She cherishes her work experience of a year at NIRMAN. Action-based learning here helps her to crystallize her ideas about youth development. Her contribution as a NIRMAN Team member is a strong addition to the process. NIRMAN workshops become a deeper experience because of her ability to form strong emotional connect with the participants. Her cheerful presence makes the workshops lively. Throughout this journey, she has been supported well by NIRMAN Team members, especially Amrut, Jui and Aarti. She feels grateful for the faith they have shown in her.

On the personal front, contrary to the general perception about work-life (im)balance in the social field, not only does she love her work, but she gets ample time to pursue her hobbies like painting and dancing. Rather the creative artist in her has found a fresh breath in the last one year.

Aditi believes that education (degree) should not be taken merely to grab a job, a fat package, but rather to create something new; to help those who are in need and not to those who are in greed. Not acquisition but application of skills for others will define the purpose of life and make it worth living! Enabling thousands of youth find out a pro-social purpose is what marks Aditi's personal search for a purposeful life!

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