

## Thought Leadership

# Voyaging beyond the horizon...

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### **Stronger together:**

Finding strength in the weave – a blog

**Dr Kemal Shaheen**

*"In silence there is eloquence. Stop weaving and see how the pattern improves"*  
Rumi



A series of papers  
engaging  
critically and creatively  
with the world  
around us as we  
voyage  
beyond the horizon...

## Stronger together:

Finding strength in the weave – a blog

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*Collaboration is a core Paper Boat value. In this blog, written in India by Kemal shortly before he joined the charity in his capacity as a Caplor Horizons advisor, our Director reflects on the collaborative spirit and why true strength is found in the weave.*

I do not see its beauty immediately because I am too wrapped up in my own mental noise about what a beautiful rug should look like.

Perhaps I am not really paying attention to that which is being unfurled before me? This rug seems so insipid, so lifeless and dull compared to the vibrant explosion of colours, the intricate weave and harmonious patterns of those we had been shown moments earlier.

This rug now at the top of the pile, Brahminesque, seems so disjointed, disparate - fragmented somehow.



We are in Jaipur, the capital city of Rajasthan, to explore partnership with Jaipur Rugs – a social enterprise driven by deeply held values and a profound vision shaped, in the words of inspirational founder Nand Kishore Chaudhary, ‘by love’ and ‘with a family’s blessing’. Over the two days that we are to spend with Mr Chaudhary and his team, almost in the subtle silence between our words, a shared sense of purpose seems to emerge. Unspoken, we seem to be asking ourselves, how can we work together with those excluded by their caste, gender, tribe and poverty, to co-create the space for stronger leadership and greater influence to change the warp and weft of business as we know it? How can we collaborate to ‘unpick’ those tangled knots like ‘Untouchability’ or ‘Patriarchy’ that weaken rather than strengthen the social fabric?

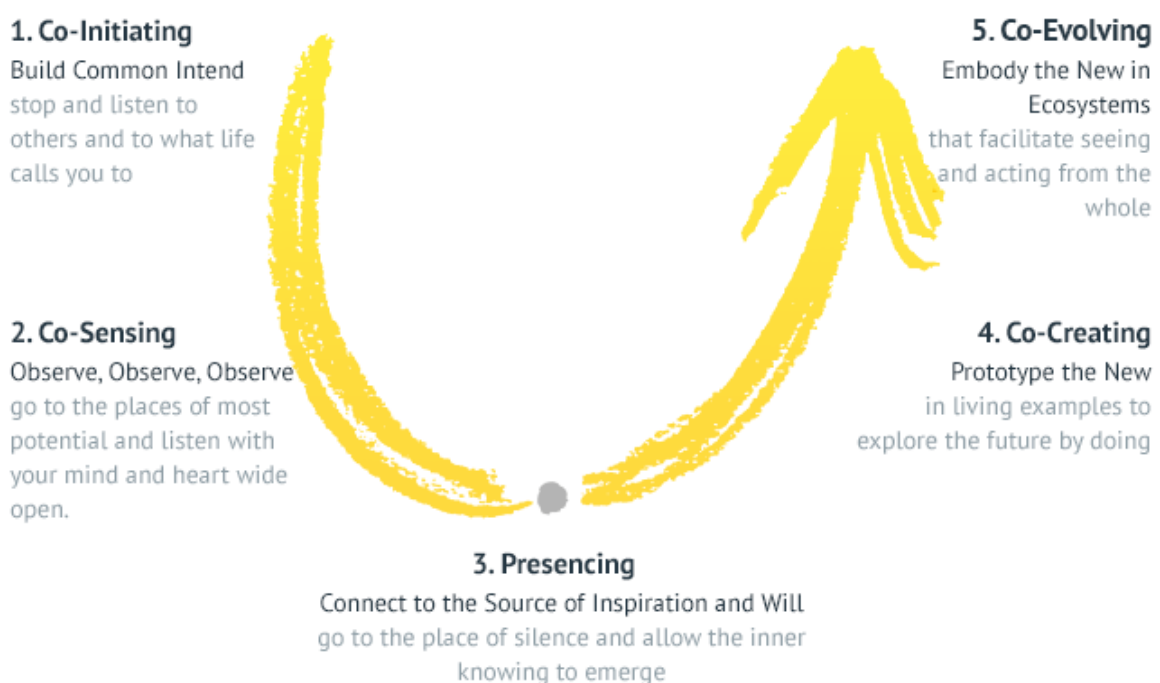
Three days later we will articulate these questions more clearly but for now they remain suspended in silence. Three days later we will be in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu – city of a thousand temples – asking a nascent network of Dalit and Tribal led organisations ‘How can we work together more effectively to improve the lives of Dalit and Tribal communities – particularly women and children?’.

But for now, here in Jaipur, as we stand looking at a rug called 'Anthar', the questions remain unspoken. 'Anthar' (meaning 'disparity' or 'difference' in Hindi) is a rug that was born out of disagreement between the three weavers that created it. Seated side by side at the loom they began weaving, each convinced that they had the superior skills, each having made up their mind that the design they were individually weaving was superior. As they wove the emergent pattern was disjointed, disparate, fragmented somehow. It was not until they started to communicate and work in concert that the pattern became more coherent, connected, and harmonious. The three weavers had each silenced their own mental noise, agreed to stop weaving in 'splendid isolation' and only then, as Rumi articulates, did the pattern improve.

As we hear the story of the rug I am reminded of how I had been struck so powerfully, when I was a doctoral researcher in India 15 years ago, by the separation and fragmentation that seemed to be woven into the fabric of the caste system with the idea that some castes were 'on top of the pile' and superior to others that were 'Untouchable', imperfect, impure somehow.

Slowly I begin to make a connection. We are in Jaipur because, some months earlier, I had made a link with Jaipur Rugs through U.lab – a global platform that brings together change makers across the planet to explore and catalyse systemic change. At the heart of Theory-U is a weaving together of the intelligence of head, heart and will which gives one the courage to 'let go' of our narrow and rigid assumptions about the world (our mental noise if you will) and 'let come' by trusting an intelligence that is more connected, collaborative and generative. Perhaps this is the 'eloquence in silence' that Rumi is pointing us to?

### Theory-U:



Last year I had shared with the 'Jaipur Rugs Innovation Hub' on the U.Lab platform some initial ideas about a project that we had been working on at Caplor Horizons to strengthen a network of Dalit and Tribal led organisations and support young Dalits released from bonded labour, a particularly pernicious form of modern slavery, to improve their leadership and entrepreneurial skills. In the back of my mind and firmly in my heart I also hoped the project might enable young Dalits to build self-esteem and self-worth which is invariably crushed by their inferior position in the caste hierarchy and exacerbated by the experience of being enslaved as bonded labourers. It is little wonder that the word Dalit means crushed. After ever deepening dialogue

with the brilliant and dynamic Yash Ranga at Jaipur Rugs we agreed that we should meet in Rajasthan before heading down to Tamil Nadu to work with Raj the equally brilliant and dynamic leader of Children Watch, a small NGO based in Kanchipuram co-ordinating the Dalit and Tribal Initiative network.



From left to right:

*Yash Ranga and Mr NK Chaudhary of Jaipur Rugs with Kemal .*

Writing this blog on our last day in Kanchipuram I am reflecting on the hugely inspiring and at times emotionally intense journey we have all been on over the last two weeks. I have lost count of the number of times I have had to wipe a tear from my eye either because we had encountered the best or worst in humanity – sometimes both as in the story of one Dalit man who had fled three generations of bonded labour after being beaten by the business owner which spurred his father to implore that he escape thereby enabling him to train as a social worker (funded by hard labour on a construction site) so that he could one day fight the injustice of untouchability.

We have covered enormous ground - beginning with a deep strategy process alongside the leadership team of Christian Brothers at Edmund Rice, New Delhi which I found so uplifting to be with such a thoughtful and caring group of human beings. Then to Jaipur and, thanks to the passion and conviction of Ian and Lorna, well on the way to crafting a 'knowledge partnership' between Jaipur Rugs and Caplor Horizons. And finally to Tamil Nadu where we heard people from crushingly poor Tribal communities tell us that 'hard work and hope' will lift them out of their poverty.



This gave Ian, Lorna, Usha and I the 'wind in our sails' much needed to work for two intense days supporting the Dalit and Tribal Initiatives network to develop a shared sense of purpose, a guiding vision and a strategy for leading change in their communities.

As I described to one of the tribal communities we visited, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Children Watch's Director Raj who, more than anyone else, had helped me during my doctoral research field work in 2003. Facilitating access to people and communities that would have been impossible without his help – I began to understand that I had stood on his shoulders to get my PhD (and so realise a dream). For the last 15 years in the back of my mind and firmly in my heart I had promised I would return to India to help Raj so that he can realise his dream of a world free from discrimination on the basis of caste, tribe and gender. Raj is just one of the inspirational leaders that we have met during our time in India and alongside him I count Mr Chaudhary and Yash, all of the deeply committed community leaders of the Dalit and Tribal Initiative Network and of course Ian, Lorna and Usha without whom this first step on a much longer journey would not have been possible.



But perhaps the 'real strength' in their leadership, as one Caplor Horizons advisor put it so beautifully, 'is in the weave'. And as Rumi testifies it is a silent strength because "*In silence there is eloquence. Stop weaving and see how the pattern improves*".

If you would like to find out more or are interested in working with us please get in touch with Dr Kemal Shaheen ([kemal@paperboatcharity.org.uk](mailto:kemal@paperboatcharity.org.uk))

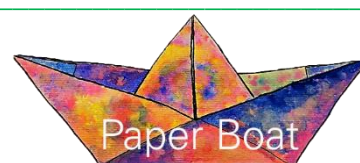
**Dr Kemal Shaheen**

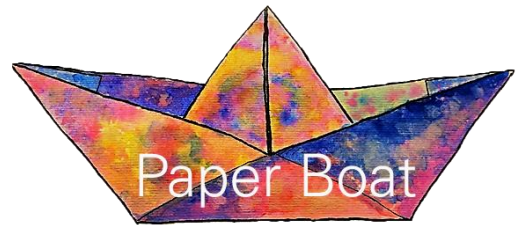
**– Director of Paper Boat and Sustainability Advisor at Caplor Horizons**

A blog from Tamil Nadu, February 2018

 **Inspiring and Enabling Leaders to Deliver a Sustainable Future**

**Inspiring and enabling children to change their world**





## Our Vision

A world that unlocks the infinite potential of every child

## Our Purpose

To listen to young people – inspiring and enabling them to change their world

## Our Mission

To establish playful and creative learning spaces at the heart of communities through innovative partnerships

## Our Values

**Courage** – child centred

**Creativity** – innovative action

**Collaboration** – stronger together

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