



# EMAIL NEWSLETTER

MAY 2022

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Dear SIETAR India members and supporters,

We are delighted to be back after we took the time to re-energize and re-think the way forward. We are delighted to welcome new additions to our Board - Dolon Gupta and Ishita Ray - both dedicated interculturalists who are no strangers to SIETAR India conferences.

Having new board members also means having to reconnect and articulate our vision and our working methods. This exercise has been so fruitful, that we have now refreshed the format of our newsletter.

The SIETAR India Board sees our newsletter as a space to give voice to all those who would like to share and learn from each other's intercultural experiences and insights. More importantly we see our readers, as not just passive consumers, but valuable contributors.

We have therefore chosen four formats for columns where we invite all of you to contribute.

The first column is entitled **“An Interculturalist by Any Other Name”**. Mostly in an interview format, this column will feature an inspiring person who has a profession other than that of an interculturalist but has been navigating cultures.

The second column is entitled **“Lost or Found in Translation”** and will feature thought provoking articles on how words, concepts, films or books navigate linguistic and cultural barriers and are either enhanced, transformed or diminished in the process.

The third column is the **“Trainer Toolkit”** which will be a space for an intercultural practitioner to share a tool, concept or framework used by them with personal insights they have gained.

The last column is on **“Intercultural Perspectives”** and is designed to capture viewpoints from the whole spectrum of diversity - generational, regional, gender etc.

So here is our first edition in the new format and we hope that it inspires you to contribute to any or all of these columns. You can reach us at [sietarindia@gmail.com](mailto:sietarindia@gmail.com)

For the SIETAR India Board  
Sunita Nichani  
President, SIETAR India

# An Interculturalist by Any Other Name

*A conversation with Sunil Sood, an IIT Delhi, IIM Calcutta & Harvard Business School alumnus, who has had a long, successful career in India, Nigeria, Bangladesh and UK in the FMCG and telecom industry. He was CEO, Pepsico Bangladesh and then went on to become CEO of Vodafone India.*

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**Mala Malkani:** Sunil, when and how in your career did you become aware that navigating cultural differences is a critical aspect of your work?

**Sunil Sood:** The topline of every company is 'purpose' led. And 'purpose' is to do with people rather than ambition or profit. In any performance-oriented organization, the cultural context is critical to getting the teams working together effectively and motivating them to perform. This becomes even more important when you go to another country as an expatriate manager and work with teams from that culture. Even within India, understanding cultural nuances is critical for business success.

**Mala:** Can you share some examples of intracultural challenges while doing business in India?

**Sunil Sood:** In many parts of India the society is male dominated, which makes it important to understand the gender issues that may arise. One example comes to mind. We were looking to increase the hiring/ participation of women in our retail sales teams. These teams typically need to go out in the field, in both upcountry and big cities and meet with retailers, distributors, wholesalers etc. We found that the female employee turnover was very high although many of them were very talented. It took us sometime to understand that the biggest reason for the turnover was the lack of toilets for them to use in these upcountry markets. In order to get around this problem, we had our HR teams visit these sales routes and earmark the places where the toilets for women were located. This is an example of why it is important for a global company to factor in the local cultural context when hiring a diversified work force. We also experienced challenges with male managers not being inclusive of their women team members and equally, male team members having reservations in reporting to women managers.

**Mala:** How did you tackle these issues?

**Sunil Sood:** We had to sensitize our employees through training programs. This takes a lot of unlearning and also requires them to navigate the differences between their social and their workplace context on a daily basis. This is not easy for them to do. It is a constant struggle and as a company, we have to repeatedly reinforce these messages.

**Mala:** Can you share some examples of how you bridged cultural differences between the headquarters and the Indian entity?

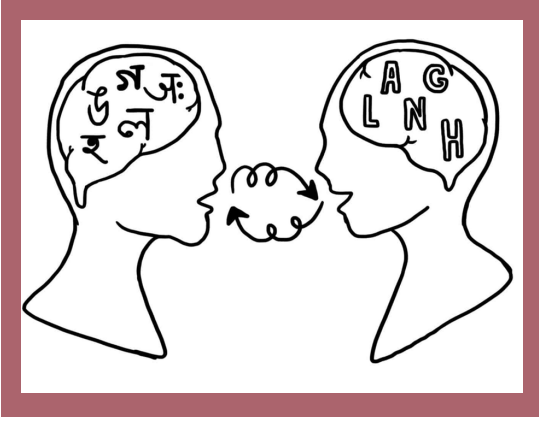
**Sunil Sood:** The Western work environment is generally more transactional, whereas in India we are more relationship oriented and try to bring in a family feeling at the workplace. If you look at companies like Unilever and Vodafone in India, which are known to be career companies, colleagues here become much more than just work associates because they spend such a large part of their lives working together. At Vodafone, our annual senior managers get-together in Jaipur, where we sponsored the polo match, was a family event. Here employees would be invited with their spouse and treated like 'royalty'. All the spouses looked forward to this event. In Vodafone India, we strongly believed that the Vodafone brand should enter the employee home. Our giveaways would be like the Vodafone ZooZoo cups which were extremely popular with the kids in the employee family. In fact, many of the employee families adopted as their pet, the iconic pug of the famous Vodafone ad. In this way, the brand became a part of their day-to-day life. The average work hours in India tend to be quite long and therefore it helps when the workplace and home do not feel too distinctly apart. To perpetuate this family feeling, celebration of small victories with colleagues becomes important. Sometimes, it is very hard to convince the western HQ that budgets are required for these forms of motivation as this is perceived by them as a waste of money.

**Mala:** So how do you get the HQ to accept these cultural differences?

**Sunil Sood:** An important part of my role as a leader was to be a bridge between the local entity and the HQ, conveying local cultural needs & expectations as well as translating policies & standards from HQ into local contexts.

# Lost or Found in Translation

*An insightful look at what facilitation entails depending on the cultures you work with. An Agile coach, Francis Laleman describes himself as a designer of cooperative learning processes. He also teaches Art, Buddhism and Sanskrit.*



## *On making it easy and ensuring friendly relationships*

“Facilitation, quid?” – she said, swiftly shifting position, on her chair and in her Zoom frame. It was obvious that she was constantly checking on herself. *Is my hair still okay?*

We were in the middle of a Gentle Cooperative Facilitation workshop – exploring cultures.

Now here is something that can keep me in joyful wonder for a whole day. She was half-British, half-Italian – and in a brief statement of doubt and confusion – a mere two words – she had given me Latin and Latin.

“Facilitation... We are *facile*-itators,” I tried.

She raised an eyebrow.

“Facilitators,” I continued. “Our job is to make the process *easy* - enough for everyone to participate. By making it *facile* to engage. Which is Latin and French and Italian for *easy*.

“Think of it like this...” - I took a deep breath and some distance from the screen - to have a better view of the group. There were Hindi speakers, Tamizh speakers, and students from Malaysia, Sri Lanka, the UK, Italy and France.

“In the Latinate world, the focus of *facilitation* is on *making things easy*. We offer the space in which a meeting of cultures can unfold. We hold that space to help the conversation emerge. We observe and learn - keen to constantly extract feedback on the go. Sensitising us to fine tune or alter the space - or the way in which we are holding it.

Now other cultures have different words for what we do. Consider Sanskrit, a language deeply embedded in so many of the Indic languages of today...”

Saying this, I detected how the faces of at least half the group lightened up.

“When a Latinate speaker means *facilitation*, an Indic speaker says *upakāra*.

Think of how this shifts the focus altogether. As if suddenly it turns into another thing.

Here is what the famous poet-statesman Kautilya wrote:

*yāvad upakaroti tāvan mitram bhavati,  
upakāralakṣaṇam mitram iti*  
(arthashastra 118,12)

This means something like

*while there is benevolence, there is due to be a friend,  
for of a friend, benevolence is the hallmark*

Do you see how making it easy for one another has changed into some kind of mutual exchange, a quid-pro-quo?”

She hesitated. The rest of the group nodded, enthusiastically.

Yes!

This is how even the simplest of words, when said in another language, can alter an entire concept or idea.

# Trainer Toolkit

*A thought provoking article on Mindfulness as a tool to raise awareness in the face of bias. Nitten Mahadik is a facilitator and mindfulness coach, currently working with Transvivo Consultants*

Speaking about mindfulness, I first should clarify what is NOT mindfulness. Mindfulness is not just a breathing practice. Mindfulness is not about relaxation, emptying the mind or developing a special state.

Mindfulness, for me, from my personal experience, is to cultivate a state of mind where, we can free ourselves from the heaps of impressions and perceptions that we have carried over for years, and have an expanded view of life and the world.

Mindfulness helps in building higher self-awareness. It may seem that a practitioner is watching the breath go in and out, and that's all. As one takes the support of the breath, one observes the mind functioning with a sense of witnessing and non-judgement. We watch our thoughts, perceptions and emotions arise, stay for a while, and then fade away. This practice experientially teaches us that our thoughts, perceptions and feelings are impermanent, so they can't be us.

We then begin to loosen up rather than solidify our thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. This gives us new insights. Hence mindfulness meditation is also called insight meditation which is not arrived at by the computing nature of the mind, but by curious exploration. It's a wrong belief that our mental sharpness will diminish with such practice. On the contrary, when judgements do not layer the mind, we can see more clearly and discern effectively.



Mindfulness practice strengthens our emotional awareness and builds a capacity not to be reactive but responsive. This skill is critical when dealing with people and situations which trigger us, and our clear seeing is impaired. With higher emotional literacy, we also become more empathic and neuroscientifically, the areas in the brain that process emotions for the self are the same areas that process emotions for others.

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## So what does this look like in a practical scenario?

Let me give you an example. At a networking event, I got a chance to meet a person. She had big tattoos and coloured hair and spoke with an accent. This is a trigger for me to withdraw as I am exactly the opposite in my grooming. Now my mind can rev up all the stereotypes and judgements and withdraw. Or I can just observe some different thoughts and uneasy feelings coming up in the body and let go of them. Rather than being reactive, be responsive and start a conversation. This is what I did and what a great conversation it was. We have also decided to work together on a project.

While mindfulness is not a quick fix that would instantly transform your world, I would still like to offer you a tool when you want a healthy interaction with someone opposite you. Bring all the attention to what sensations you feel in the body, notice what thoughts are coming up (remember they are all just mental impressions), let go of them (reminding yourself, "I am not my thoughts), take a breath and start the conversation. Hold the awareness that it's just a conversation with a different person and not a battle. Awareness precedes change.

# Intercultural Perspectives

## *We asked Millennials in India:*

**What makes your generation different from the one that came before, or the one that will come after?**

**What's different about your generation?**

Our generation is the transition generation. We hold values of both the gen Z and struggling with boomers trying to understand them as well. Our generation is cursed with weight of the transformational responsibilities and economic volatility. We have adopted with changing times and technology but the changes have been so intermittent that we have somewhere lost balance of our own lives trying to just keep up.

Our early childhood was traditional but youth was digital. Moreover, unconventional jobs and different working hours are made into a new norm.

Our generation saw the shift from real to virtual while growing up. We are on the threshold of it.

We are between being rooted (previous generation) and uprooted (the next generation)

We're not really motivated to do much about problems that could occur soon.

From the one that came before, we may be good at adapting to new technology cause we kind of evolve with it. But we might be less woke and most of us will probably never own any real estate. From the one that will come after we might fall back with tech and also I think they are fearless.





# Introducing our New Board members



## Ishita Ray

A learning professional of the 21st century, I have navigated a wide range of multilingual and multicultural contexts in India and abroad during my dozen plus years in the learning chain of academic and corporate organisations. I have successfully orchestrated end-to-end learning cycles of organization-wide programs in Business and Intercultural Communication, language learning, and Design Thinking. A published author, my book “Actioning Inclusion” is a multidisciplinary collaboration that embodies the key mission of making learning spaces and outcomes relevant and accessible for every individual.

## Dolon Gupta

I started off as a teacher of French, moved organically towards Intercultural Studies and finally joined the corporate world to become a Culture and Communication trainer. I was Head of Culture and Language Initiatives at Tata Consultancy Services. Building strategy, conceptualizing and delivering training solutions to enhance collaboration and productivity of ~450,000+ workforce comprising 100+ nationalities and languages, across the globe, was my primary task.

As an independent consultant, I now work with start-ups and multinationals. I serve on the advisory Board of Universities and educational institutes.



## Upcoming Webinar

# THE INTERCULTURALIST'S TOOL KIT: MINDFULNESS

May 11th at 8:00PM (INDIA)

With Nitten Mahadik  
of Transvivo Consultants  
A facilitator and mindfulness coach

Experience how to use mindfulness as a tool for self-awareness and for encouraging intercultural dialogue. The one hour session will end with an opportunity to network in small groups and share stories and best practices related to mindfulness techniques.

**Register via email:** [sietarindia@gmail.com](mailto:sietarindia@gmail.com)



### *Biography*

Nitten has a total experience of 22 years. He has sales experience of selling confectionery to high-end Real Estate. Before foraying into training, Nitten also led large teams in an NGO and as an orator delivered mass programs all across Maharashtra. Nitten has worked in the areas of Public Speaking & Communication, Sales, Stress Management, Voice culture & Expression, Team Building, Leadership, Unconscious Bias, Mentoring and Motivation. He is a Mindfulness practitioner for a decade and has conducted Mindfulness-Based Emotional Intelligence workshops in corporates, education sector, and NGOs. Using Mindfulness and theatre skills he has coached people to achieve well being and enhance their Impact and Influence. He is a trained actor from Jeff Goldberg Studio and has delivered more than 100 performances so far. Using theatre and experiential learning approach he has also groomed facilitators. With his humorous, narrative style and examples, he keeps his audience highly engaged and involved in the learning process.



# SIETARINDIA

## SOCIETY FOR INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION, TRAINING & RESEARCH

The Society for Intercultural Education Training and Research (SIETAR) - India is a non-profit association of educators, researchers and trainers from a wide range of practical and academic disciplines who share a common concern for intercultural relations. SIETAR-India provides an opportunity to learn from and share with colleagues in the intercultural arena and advance the body of knowledge and practice in the field.

Established in 1974, SIETAR has over 3500 members world-wide with affiliates in many countries. SIETAR holds Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) status with the United Nations and the Council of Europe. SIETAR - India is part of the global network of SIETAR organizations.

### Contact Us

**Email:** [sietarindia@gmail.com](mailto:sietarindia@gmail.com)

**Website:** [www.sietar-india.org](http://www.sietar-india.org)

For more information or to submit a guest article please send us an email.

## OUR TEAM

**Sunita Nichani**  
President

**Divya Vikas Amarnath**  
Board Member

**Lakshmi Kumar**  
Founder Board Member

**Dolon Gupta**  
Board Member

**Mala Malkani**  
Secretretary

**Ishita Ray**  
Board Member

## UPCOMING SIETAR EVENTS AROUND THE GLOBE

### SIETAR SWITZERLAND CONFERENCE IN YVERDON LES BAINS

**Date:** May 13 to May 15

**Topic:** *Inteculturality for a Sustainable future*

### SEITAR EUROPA CONFERENCE IN MATLA

**Date:** May 19 to May 21

**Topic:** *Rethinking Interculturalism*