

MFC: A Learning Experience

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As most of us know MFC was an offshoot of a youth movement called Tarun Shanti Sena. For those who have arrived late, in the middle of the last century there was a wide spread youth unrest through out the world. Young people were not happy with the education system, society, political system and what not. In our country number of educated unemployed was increasing. Many universities were closed. Energy of youth was being wasted in anti-Hindi, anti-English like destructive movements.

Tarun Shanti Sena (TSS) was born out of an effort to channelise energy of young people constructively to fight for a just and humane society. It was a group welded to the certain values like democracy, national integration, world peace, secularism, social equality & economic justice. One of its main campaign was revolution in education. We received good response from all the faculties except medical students who believed that medical education does not require any change.

In 1973 when Abhay Bang went to a Primary Health Center in rural Maharashtra for his internship, he realized that his medical education has not trained him enough to deal with the health problems of rural India. He wrote a long letter about problems he faced at PHC. I was National Convener of Tarun Shanti Sena based at Varanasi at that time. In March 1973 we decided to circulate this letter to the medicos in Tarun Shanti Sena. We received many letters endorsing the views expressed by Abhay. We decided to start a small discussion forum to discuss the health problems of rural area and medical education. That is how Medico Friend Circle was born.

It was Abhay who used to prepare material for cyclostyle bulletins (For the young members - cyclostyle was a process like screen printing. You were suppose to cut a stencil sheet on a typewriter and then mount it on cyclostyle machine and operate it manually to make copies of the typed matter) and even covering letters which had my signature. It is by default I became the unofficial Convener of MFC. Recipient of bulletin suggested names of their friends who will be interested in receiving the bulletin. Mailing list grew with every issue of bulletin. After some time there were more recipient of the bulletin outside the TSS circle. लोग साथ आते गये, और कारवां बढ़ता गया.

It was our experience in TSS that working together, traveling together, enjoying together and suffering together strengthen friendship among members. Participation in action oriented camps brought coworkers close to each other. MFC organized many work-cum-study camps in early period which helped the members come closer to each

other and the grassroots problems.

Anecdotes from camps

The first such camp was organized at Govindpur to conduct a general health survey. One of our team was staying with a poor farmer in a small village. His newborn child was suffering from pneumonia. Doctors in the team examined the child, prognosis was hopeless. Next morning the host requested us to take lunch early. Later we came to know the reason. Our host was sure that the child won't survive till noon and in case of child's death before lunch, they will not be able to feed us. It was a lesson about rich culture of our poor people.

At another camp in Kutch, a pastoral woman brought her child who was suffering from severe pneumonia since three days to the clinic. When the doctor scolded her "इतनी देर से क्यों लेकर आई हो? मालूम नहीं कि बच्चा सख्त बीमार है? She replied politely: "जानती हूँ, पर क्या करूँ? मेरी गाय का बछड़ा बीमार था. पहले उसे दवाखाने ले कर गई. वो ठीक हुआ तो अब अपने बच्चे को लेकर आई. गाय तो बछड़े को लेकर नहीं जा सकती थी." Tears rolled from our eyes. What a noble culture do these illiterate people have and we highly educated (?) professionals have guts to give sermons to them.

MFC camp at Pindval was about Malaria so we decided to educate tribal people about mosquito control. We borrowed a 16 mm projector from Publicity department and screened a film about mosquito breeding and control to a fairly good audience. At the end we asked them what steps now you will take to control the mosquito? They told us that they don't need to do anything because they do not have such big mosquitoes. That was the first lesson I learned about health education.

In Reva camp we had three teams and one Jeep to transport survey teams to and from their target villages daily. On day 2 our jeep's transmission rod ditched us mid way and we could not collect the teams in time. This was when mobile-phones were not there. At the end of the day not seeing the jeep, one team asked someone for the directions of our base camp. He pointed towards a buffalo which was grazing 500 meters away. They took that direction but ended up somewhere else. Reason was that the team was going from south to north and the buffalo was also moving from east to west while grazing, therefore our team missed the direction just by 100 meters. They ended up 2 kilometers from the base camp.

Some participants reported that when they went to a village for survey people shut their doors. Even after telling them that we are doctors and conducting a health survey people were reluctant to open the doors. Next afternoon a SHO of nearby police

station came to the base camp. He told us that somebody has registered a complaint that dacoits are moving in the villages disguising as doctors. In their lifetime they never saw a single doctor coming to the village and here doctors were moving door to door in group. It was hard to believe.

During Hoshangabad camp we were staying in a village where Ramlila was going on. In the evening 4 male 3 female participants went to see the Ramlila. Since they were doctors, they were invited to sit on stage. It was a very slow and boring drama so we wanted to go back to our camp site. Since there was huge crowd in front of the stage we told one of the organizers that we want to get out (हमें बाहर जाना है). We could see that our request created some dilemma among the organizers. After some consultations one person approached us and asked: “आपको सभी को बाहर जाना है?” (Do all of you want to go out now?) We told “yes”. After some thought he told us “follow me.” He took us out from the backside of the stage to an open field and told us: “do it here” (यहीं कर लीजिये). Now it was our turn to get puzzled. “Do what?” We asked. “Get relieved! didn't you asked for that?” Then we realized that in local language बाहर जाना means toilet. Now we realized what was their dilemma. They must be disturbed about our mixed (4 male 3 female) group's demand for relieving together without any shame.

MFC Bulletin

During 2nd Annual Meet of MFC at Sewagram it was decided to bring out the printed version of MFC Bulletin. Topics for next 12 issues were decided, members took responsibility to write on these topics and majority of them kept their promises. Ashwin Patel was to edit the bulletin and I was supposed to look after the production.

The first task was to design the format and layout of magazine. Our friends at National Institute of Designs, Ahmedabad viz. Abir Malik, Nimesh Bhatt and Poorna took the responsibility. It was Poorna who designed the front page. The famous red circle was used to balance the masthead. It was thought that the color of the circle can be changed every year for new volume. Little did she know that within one year it will become the symbol of MFC. Much of the layout of Bulletin has changed since then but the red circle has survived for 40 years.

There was an excellent printing press in Baroda called ‘Yagna Mudrika’. It's in charge Shri Chunibhai Vaidya was well known to us. Therefore we decided to print the Bulletin at Yagna Mudrika but we came to know that it does not have required English fonts. Shri Chunibhai came to our rescue, he gave me the responsibility to select and purchase the appropriate fonts and other material necessary for printing the Bulletin.

So we did lot of research about fonts and other material for composing in English. We purchased the necessary equipments and setup the English composing department at Yagna Mudrika. It is difficult to forget Mangal Bhaiya, Ravi, Mafatlal and Dhanuram who composed the matter which was difficult to read. Ravi never made a spelling mistake. Whenever there was a spelling mistake in proof, it was in the original copy. Pressman Baburao was perfectionist. Within three moths the Bulletin was a hit. Similarly, after two years when 'In Search of Diagnosis' was published many readers could hardly believe that it was not printed on offset press. The credit goes to this team.

In Search of Diagnosis was the first English book I designed. Its production was a great learning experience. The book was received well. For this book I sketched a cartoon about tonics. Indian Express published its review on the editorial page reproducing the cartoon with it. Many magazines reproduced that cartoon from Indian Express giving credit – Abu in Indian Express. That was the best compliment I got.