



TRIBAL MENSA NURTURING PROGRAM

MENSA INDIA PUNE CHAPTER

Sita- Wildflower in Tribal Niche

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Monthly Report: January 2008

Pongal Workshop (10th Jan – 15th Jan 2008)

Shouting "Pongalo Pongal ! I came to Nishta Kendra on the 10th January. I was very excited as it was a lovely break away from school, right after appearing for exams.

Pongal they say is the South Indian festival of prosperity. True to the name of the workshop, we all tried to show how prosperous we have grown in our thoughts and action. We were taking initiative, we motivated each other and our brains were always bursting with ideas.

This time, I traveled to the Raj guru Nagar bus stand with my teachers starting early in the morning. I made sure I had packed the seeds, stones, leaves and soil samples I had collected. Sachin dada picked us up from there and took us to the Nishta Kendra. During the bus journey I met my friends. We had a lot to catch up on since Karthik Damodar.

As the I saw my Maher Ghar through the window of the bus, my eagerness to start with the workshop grew. Narayan dada, Sashi Tai were already there to welcome us along with a few of my friends who had arrived earlier than me.

It was afternoon, and we all arranged ourselves in the Ananta Kaksh (that's where the meetings take place). We found our stationary, caps, bedding and bags. We got really big bags! I loved the design on mine. Our group leaders took over and made sure that we were all set for the next four days.

Evening time was free, and I spent it by looking around my Maher Ghar. I found that the library had a lot more books than last time. It had autobiographies, craft books, story books, comic books, and books on science too. I wondered if I would get to read them. I also found a whole new set of games. These games were much different than the ones I knew. A game I particularly liked was Brain vita. I know that some of the boys stayed up late to make a model from the game called Mechnix... I am waiting for my turn.

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Some of my friends started doing their group tasks. The Swachhata Gat (Cleanliness Group) had made sure that the Maher Ghar was clean. They put all the buckets and towels in place. The Manoranjan Gat (Entertainment Group) had started to make a list of the library books, taking care of the games etc. At this time Narayan dada called us for a meeting. He gave us special colored bands to wear on our hands. I am in Annapurna Gat and got a yellow colored band. Bagicha (Garden Group) Gat got a green, Paani (Water Group) got a blue, and Swachhata Gat got a white, while Manoranjan got a red band.

These Bands, which he gave us, are special because they make us feel like we are part of a team. Now, we are not just Tribal Mensans. We are Tribal Mensans from Annapurna Gat!!

Then he told us to take a group-wise meeting (gata-shaha baithak) to discuss how we could excel at our daily tasks. He appreciated us for doing them with perseverance, but now he wanted us to learn innovation. When we sat in our meeting, we put up a lot of ideas. Varsha Tai, Muktatai, Ketki Tai helped us too. But every time, our discussion would be a chaos. All of us would start talking, some wouldn't talk at all. There was no order. After observing this, Narayan dada talked to us about how a meeting should take place. He taught us how to increase participation, motivate everyone in the group and how to maintain decorum. He spoke about how a group leader should take over a meeting, how he should direct it, and yet let all the wild ideas come up. He also told us about how leaders talk, stand, encourage and participate.

When I slept I wondered if there was a leader inside me... What work will I do as a leader of my group? I must come up with new ideas.

We woke up as usual to the sounds of Suprabhatam. I always miss this sound in my school. Then we went to the Dhyani Kaksh to do our morning 'chintan' or meditation. Narayan dada read out two lines from a book by Dr. Appa Pendse. The lines talked about having a dream and doing all it takes to achieve it, to turn it into a vision. He asked us what we wanted to be when we grow up. Most of us wanted to be teachers, engineers, doctors, and soldiers. He then told us that we must work hard to achieve it, make it our goal. We must try to understand what skills are required for our chosen dream, and find a way to develop them. He also narrated to us stories of valour and the spark of intelligence. He talked about his

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friends Vijay Chandrachud and Aba Hasabnis. I am waiting to meet them, especially Aba Hasabnis.

Before long, it was time for the workshop. Swapna Tai, Shruti Tai, Anjali Tai, Sujal Tai and Sameena Tai have arrived. We were introduced to a new game called "EK" or one. We had to enlist our groups 'one' favorite river, tree, animal, God, food, country, feeling etc. The challenge was that when we select one, we had to consider each one's thought. Different people have different likings, hence our challenge was to integrate each one's ideas. In the Swachhata Gat, everyone except one decided that Maharashtra was their favorite state. Only one of them said Jammu and Kashmir. He defended his case, and then they decided that their group's favorite state would be Jammu and Kashmir. In Paani Gat, there was a dispute to find out a favorite tree. Each one had a different choice; no majority voting could be done. So, they intelligently listed it as 'fruiting trees' as our favorite, and they had an 'Eki'(oneness). I think every leader should be able to find this Oneness among the people. That reminded me of the discussion last night, and we made an innovative Menu card in Hindi before lunch. We also re-organized the seating arrangement to better suit us for serving everyone.

In the afternoon session, we were told to write 500 observations of the leaf, like we had observed a potato in Karthik Damodar. I came up with 100 but 500 seemed to be difficult. Narayan dada later explained us how we have to come up with basic parameters, and then work on their permutation combinations. Now 500 seems easy. Based on the observations, we made poems, stories and jokes. We are learning to observe and build ideas on our observations. Then came the most loved part of the day! We went out for the 'Daal'. Gaurav dada, Rahul dada and two more friends had come to the Maher Ghar to teach us new outdoor games. They taught us 'Chauras Cricket' (baseball) and 'Dasha Hastantare' (ten passes). I was a little nervous to play 'Chauras Cricket' as I couldn't hit the ball initially. But I decided to concentrate more. I looked more attentively at it and then! I had it up in the air! I managed to make two runs! But the boys were much better at batting. They had difficulty in fielding though. In the game of ten passes, it took us a lot of strategy and team spirit. It was great fun.

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When we came back the lights were out, so we had to sit together in the yellow candle light.

Dada told us short Japanese about a father and son separated during an earthquake. The story talked about faith in each other and perseverance. It made me very emotional. Then we song our group songs, an abhanga by Tukaram and the Prabhodhan Geet. We discussed our favorite lines .Keshar, Sarala; Chandana even added a few lines in them! Just as we finished singing, we felt our energy was at a peak, and the lights came back. I laughed at the thought that maybe it was our minds making the light today!

In the morning, Mukta Tai read out the story of Vivekananda's childhood. Gaurav dada explained to us about how Vivekananda was a man with a mission. Then he took us out for the morning Dal. Ketki tai helped him out. We did a fun but creative game, where we had to come up with innovative uses of a mug. During breakfast Narayan dada told us that today would be a day of exercising. Morning to exercise the body, and afternoon to exercise the brain!

Dr. Tanuja Oak and Swati Joshi had come to visit us. They taught us some basic Yoga. Dr. Tanuja first told u about the importance of exercising, and how best to do it. The she asked us to do Suryanamaskar. We bended, stretched, flexed and breathed. Aoww! I need to practice everyday to get better at it.

In the afternoon there was a fun activity, or so we thought! It was called 'Maha Manav'. We had to describe how our ideal 'super person' would be like, what qualities he would have etc. First we enlisted all the great leaders and great people we know. (Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Kalam, Sachin Tendulkar, and Kiran Bedi, etc.)Then we found what qualities made them so – visionary, spirited, empathetic, etc. Then we combined the qualities we thought best and important to give shape to our 'Maha Manav'. My Maha Manav was a fabulous cook along with being a warrior! Could I be her one day?

In the night we met Dr. Pratibha Kulkarni. She talked to us about how and why to take care of our health. I had a lot of questions in my mind, which she clarified in very simple language.

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After that we viewed the movie 'Spirit'. It was about the adventures of a horse. We had to identify all the feelings shown in the movie. It was very difficult to concentrate after a long tiring day. We all ran to our beds.

Sleeping that night I wondered about what all we did during the day. A lot of people had come to visit. Amruta Tai had come here even when her leg was broken! And all the other tais were always around us to help. Why are they so interested in us? Narayan dada always says that we are a topic of research, and we are unique in the world. What is this 'intelligence' that makes me this special? What do I do with it? I was fast asleep.

On the third day morning, Pratibha Tai read out a poem called 'Aag Gadi ani Jameen' or 'The train and the Earth'. The way she recited the poem was so vivid. We could almost see the arrogant train zooming over the mountains inflicting pain on the Earth below. Then Amruta Tai explained us the rhyme, rhythm and feeling of the poem. We were learning how to personify things, how symbolism can be used to express complex ideas simply. It was truly enriching.

Just as we reached our artistic high, we were introduced to Science teacher, Milind Naik. He seemed to be a normal person, until he did all his magic tricks!! He could make a volcano erupt; sounds from broken pipes, letters appear on a white paper! But his biggest magic was, that he triggered our scientific minds. My little friend Sharad tried solving all the puzzles in front of us. Kiran too helped him out. Dr. Naik helped us understand that science can be fun when you start asking Whys? How's? And Why knots? All answers lie in questions!

By this time Sameena Tai asked us to do something very different. She asked us to do some gardening work. I didn't know then, but it was an exam! I wish I had such fun exams in school! Sameena Tai was seeing how we worked in a team. She is doing a research about leadership amongst us and how it can be enriched. Slowly I am starting to understand what the theme of this workshop is. This time it was all about exposing us to varied areas where we can explore our leadership and team spirit.

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In the evening, we played a few more team games. This time, I made it a point to be more organized in our group. As a result, we won in a relay race. It needs both individual and team efforts... we are learning fast isn't it?

But Bagicha gat won three games! I am sure they have better strategies than us. I must learn from them. By now, we all have identified something special in each one of us.

Running and jumping on the black farm soil made me tired, and I could barely keep my eyes open to watch the courageous boy in Home Alone!

It was 14th January, and so we all ate 'Pongal'. It was a new preparation. I have never tasted it before. There are so many new things Deshpande kaku cooks for us with help of Dixit kaku! The night before she had made tomato soup. We drank it before dinner. When I go home, I will tell my mother and abba all about it. I want to give it my little brother on a cold evening! He will be very happy I came here!

During breakfast, Amruta Tai talked about what this workshop were all about, what we will learn from them? She also talked about the five Kosha. All the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are slowly fitting in. It will be sometime before I can truly understand though. For now, I know I have to give my best in the workshop, teach my friends all that I learn and most important of all.. to be more AWARE of my surroundings.

Today we spent the day completing our work, packing and cleaning our Maher Ghar. Sashi Tai gave us some fun tests too. I am eagerly awaiting the results. These tests are very interesting!

By evening we were all set to leave and it was time for our Entertainment programs. We heard many Gawlans, Bhajans etc from the Akash from (Terungan). They are very good at it.

It is always sad to say the goodbyes. Narayan dada made it easier by reading out the 15th Chapter of The Gita before we left. It made our minds calmer. Due to the serene sounds, everything that we did for the past four days got firmly imprinted. It will keep ringing for days.

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