

The AIFUCTO and the AUT

Prof. N.S. Raghunathan, Former General Secretary AUT

Having published policy notes, lead papers and other articles overladen with ideologies and principles, the souvenir should have something on the lighter side. This is a humble but earnest attempt at it.

The AUT got the whiff of the AIFUCTO in the seventies when Prof. Amiya Das Gupta, founder and the General Secretary of the All India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organizatis, brought it to Chennai for a Zonal Conference. It was a packed hall at WUS center and a pleasant evening. The theme of the conference was 'Democratization of College and Universities' a first time phrase for many a teachers in the South. The teacher – leaders from upper India spoke eloquently, it was their last speaker, a Bengali teacher from a college in Delhi, who electrified the audience for nearly half-an-hour with his exposition of Democratic Governance of Higher education. He spoke on the theme most convincingly. One of the spokes persons for AUT was an elderly Sanskrit Professor from a Chennai College. He was traditional in dress and appearance but most modern in spirit. He said "you leaders of AIFUCTO often referred to "Gajendra Gadkar Commission report, "but we in the South only know of "Gajendra Moksham" (meaning total surrender), implying the plight of aided College teachers in the South. He added emphatically that aided College management in the South did not subscribe to the idea that "the donor cannot be the owner", implying the fundal and attitude of the College authorities. There remarks of the Professor resulted in ripples of laughter among the AIFUCTO leadership.

The next landmark event was the Morch from Express estate to India Gate at New Delhi in which some of us participated. The Sanskrit Professor was a member of the team. He was amazed at the liven out of teachers in the AIFUCTO March in such large numbers and their spirited slogan shouting, and lamented how conservative were we in the South. He was, from then on, the most articulate exponent of the teachers' cause in his College as well as the city. By now AUT had become a proactive federated unit of the AIFUCTO without any claim to leadership donning any cloak of political hue. The AUT has not missed any conference or Morcha all these years.

In the eighties a large contingent went to Delhi to participate in a 'Jail Bharo' programme. The AUT teachers were accommodated in the Jamia Milia Islamia University. It was a little away in those days. The AUT team arrived by late evening, hungry and famished after that a tedious journey by the Grand Trunk Express. The Jamia Milia people were most hospitable and in their eagerness had earlier enquired the AIFUCTO leaderships as to what food the Chennai people would prefer. TO us delicious food became important after the chugging noise and the recurring rattle of the train for two nights and days.

"Food is important only when there is no feast for the ears" says Thirukkural. The Jamia Milia people were probably told that the Chennaites (Madrasis) love rice and sambar. The delegates were taken to the dining hall very big circular plates and tall tumblers were set on the table. Huge quantities of fine ria and thick sambar, alongwith mounts of the curry (all steaming hot) were set on the table to our astonishment. We causally enquired whether there would be pooris / chappathis or anything else. They politely informed that only rice and sambar were prepared because that is what we would like the most. The confusion is result of two factors. One is that the Indian Cuisine is so varied, and the other is that we always pigeon – hole people

even based on food. But all there are slowly disintegrating and that is one of the bear advantages of having a federation. There is a 'national integration' atleast on the food front'.

That brings us to "National Integration" Conference of the AIFUCTO at Ooty. We also remember that in one AIFUCTO Conference the fare was entirely Vegetarian. One delegate remarked by the end of the day in a light vein, I am happy that atleast by tomorrow we can end this grass eating exercise. Clean and non – vegetarian food is necessary but the logistics makes it difficult at big conferences.

The then Chief Minister of Tamilnadu was the inaugurate the AIFUCTO Conference at Ooty. The arrival was slightly delayed and so some speakers were asked to speak. One official of the University of Madras was speaking and when he was about to conclude, he saw the Chief Minister entering the auditorium. The speaker instead of completing the speak, continued it to impress the Chief Minister. He said in a typical 'cronying flunkey style' that Tamilnadu Government was the first state to accept and implement the UGC Scales which was not true. Moreover the UGC scales were accepted under a President's Rule and the Chief Minister had no note in it. Immediately a Sardarji delegate from Delhi stood up and said "Speaker", what you utter is a travesty of truth. The speaker absolutely closes his speck and left. Even the Chief Minister made a casual observations on the interruption. The healthy irreverence to authority is one that we have to learn from our colleagues in the North.

Food brings us another interesting experience. We want for an AIFUCTO Conference at Siliguru and at that time there was a 'rain storm' there. Things were difficult even through the journey. We managed the survive on Bhelpuri elachi tea avoiding the Machi Khrana enroute. To our surprise we found a restaurant there with an advertisement there that Idlis were available there. We entered the shop, sat there and ordered six Idlis each in our eagerness after missing the delicacy for over a week. The Idlis arrived. Ho! They were in the right shape but of mega size and in a stony texture. We could not eat more than one!

In the MUMBAI conference of AIFUCTO in 1987 At the end AIFUCTO President Dr. K.K.Thekedath read out the Movement Resolutions for the All India Strike. It was done by him in all seriousness befitting the solemn occasion making everybody stand. Some of us had taken members of our family for the conference. A little boy with us asked innocuously. What is this dad! The assembly prayer and oath are always at the beginning in our school. But here it is at the end of the day? "We said", Prayers to God are at the beginning but prayers to Government are at the end, but never ending because Govt have a fragile memory unlike the Gods.

Another interesting at Mumbai is connected with our boat journey to Elephanta cares. One of our team members, a Scientist, was all through lamenting about the rickety nature of the launch, the water that was now and then being baled out of the boat etc. In fact he was panicky about the "watery adventure" from the beginning. Quite ironically, when he tried to jump on to the boat from the ramp, the boat moved slightly and he was caught precariously between the boat and the ramp. Fortunately he was tossed into the boat by the clever and timely efforts of the boatman, much to the relief of all of us. There was no damage done!.

Our experiences during before and after the conferences are too many to count and narrate. But each little incident has definitely enriched us in some way or the other. Travel, as pointed out by Rakula Sangrityaya is not just change of place but change of mind, and expansion of our horizons and a sharpening of our perspectives. Beyond places, beyond languages and beyond mundane matters, the novelty of new situations and interchange of healthy principles and

social concerns have united us all in an emotional plane where we as teachers learn so much, away from classes.