

Memories of an AAPI foot soldier

**“The farther backwards you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see”
-Winston Churchill**

It seems just yesterday when I joined the AAPI but in reality it was the summer of 1986. The proceedings of that AAPI annual meeting made an indelible mark in the string of memories that were yet to come. I was enchanted by the large turnout of Indian physicians, by the emotion-churning speeches and I was equally excited with the prospect of having a premier ethnic medical organization carry my voice all the way to the United States Congress.

During those years we were referred to as ‘foreign medical graduates - FMGs’ in short and referred to as ‘aliens’ even though we were all citizens of planet earth and not from an alien planetary system. A change seemed eminent but the task was daunting. The prospect of having a united voice representing our common medical interest was not only welcome but also timely. The FMGs had awakened.



It was in Atlantic City that I reconnected with my professor, Dr. Sunder Mansukhani who without hesitation gave me his hotel room when I told him that I was unable to find an accommodation in the hotel. I was equally amazed that he remembered my name and treated me with the love and affection of a long-lost relative. I heard and listened to the AAPI trendsetters who gave vision to my voice and theirs that resonated demanding equality. When I returned to Boston I carried with me a comforting thought that AAPI was there to safeguard my future medical interest. That feeling of comfort and camaraderie has kept me returning home to AAPI each year.

At a subsequent meeting in Orlando I was somewhat shaken by the lack of cordiality and also by the discord and lack of continuity. The proceedings definitely took away the feeling of camaraderie that AAPI had espoused in me the previous year in Atlantic City. Had I gambled and lost in the casino town the previous year? There was fierce infighting between two groups and each group had brought with them their private attorney to represent their collective interest. What followed the Orlando meeting was a succession of presidential selection mostly from the group that had successfully taken over the AAPI reins at the Orlando convention. Somehow, the organization lost some of its gusto and the race for leadership overshadowed much of the organizational goals. Two or more factions were formed and the same people that held hands at the Atlantic City convention were now unable to resolve their differences. Some of the past leaders and their entourage stopped coming to the AAPI meetings for some years to follow. Over time, thankfully the divide was forgotten and AAPI resumed its important mission of representing the Indian physician practicing in the United States of America.



Some leaders meanwhile remained a legend in their own minds whilst others such as Dr. Satya Ahuja brought great leadership, finesse and cohesiveness to AAPI. During the earlier days the AAPI leadership was a boy's club in spite of the fact that more than 40 percent of its members were female physicians. Dr. Chander Kapasi broke that mold when she was elected a chairperson of the Board of trustees. This bold and appropriately forward move opened APPI leadership to the female Indian physicians who later followed her lead. These

female physicians tempered the leadership with class, and finesse of an Indian mother who single-handedly juggled busy practices, cared for the family and home.

In the past two decades I served on several committees and enjoyed the privilege of taking a CME conference on Sports Medicine to the National Sports Institute of India.

Sir Winston Churchill said, "The farther backwards you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see". And in that spirit I have looked far into our past to predict the future. Like most organizations we have gone through growing pains, infighting, ego trips, and we have virtually been to the moon and back (Orlando annual meeting), and much, much more but all in all AAPI has achieved unparalleled successes in representing the Indian physician in the medical arena. I distinctly remember the successes of the ethics and grievance committee during my years as its chair. We stood toe to toe with medical goliaths and won. It was a first for an ethnic organization to confront injustice and inequality with successful outcomes. The years were so successful that three years later an Ethics Committee chairman staked his claim in an AAPI resource book to a 'complaint-response-algorithm' that my committee had proposed, adopted and used to successfully investigate issues of grievances.



I am hopeful that we will continue to return to our constitution and bylaws in time of duress and doubt. The constitution must always be our moral compass. I believe that we have a long way to go and the road may be an uphill climb at times, and the destination may not be in sight but we must remember that the road is never long between friends.

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