

MAHAN STORY

A doctor (M.D.-Medicine), with bag of few instruments and medicines peddles from hamlet to hamlet, walks to weekly bazaar, and crosses the jungle by bullock cart..... A lady doctor (M.S.-Ophthalmologist) washes clothes of patients, cooks food for them in addition to operating them..... In remote tribal hamlets of Melghat (District Amravati), a tribal, performs artificial respiration for 60 min and saves baby suffering from birth asphyxia.....**A scorpion lying in a bed throughout the night, or various snakes as good as pet to this campus. These are few symbolic experiences at MAHAN** (Meditation, Addiction, Health, Aids & Nutrition) **a NGO run by Dr. Ashish Satav along with their staff in remote, tribal place of Melghat since 1997.** Subsequently Dr. Kavita-M.S. (Ophthalmologist), after marrying to Ashish joined MAHAN.

MELGHAT is a known to the outside world by two words "Malnutrition" and "Project Tiger". This hilly forest area is a habitat for various wild animals. It is 150 Km away from district place Amravati and to reach there one has to cross the forest, mountains & sharp Ghats for 100 Km. Most of the population is tribal, poor and living very hard life.

Few years back, in Melghat less than 5 children mortality rate, Infant Mortality Rate, Premature adults' deaths & maternal mortality rate were very high and was burning issue. Due to the lack of proper medical facilities and superstitions, the tribals went to traditional faith healers /quacks. 'Damma', a method to treat patient by burning skin by red hot iron was widely followed.

In the beginning it started in small hut like hut of any other tribal. This hut was OPD cum IPD cum ICU cum Dr. Ashish's residence. Even today -the nearest neighbour on either side is 6-7 km away, farms and river on back side, front side a forest with lake inside, where animals come to drink water. Various kinds of snakes including cobra, viper, krait etc are regular visitors. **The patients were being carried to clinic in bullock carts or on wooden bed from neighboring state of M.P. too!** Thousands of patients of Heart Attack, Brain hemorrhage, TB, Snakes Bites etc are saved in this hut clinic.



Ashish reveals one of his experiences- Once; at around 12 midnight a patient of serious heart attack was admitted in government hospital. As there was not a single physician, I was called to treat that patient. I had carried one E.C.G. machine, injection Streptokinase. There was no cardiac monitor or defibrillator. It was my first experience to treat such patient with such minimum facilities. A lightening thought runs through my mind- "If I treat the patient and if he succumbs, then people will not believe me and I might have to leave Melghat". But then I realized that, "if I treat that patient, there is 90% chance that he will survive. But if I do not treat, there is 100% chance he will die. With my strong will power I started the treatment. The patient was out of danger at around 4 a.m. But after then, till now, I have successfully treated more than 800 serious patients with no fear in mind. In most of the cases, critical care happened in hut.

Kavita's experience is very touching. Once a pregnant tribal was about deliver the baby. However there was a problem in baby coming fully out of mother's body. Her relatives were persistently asking Kavita to conduct the delivery. Kavita on reaching to patient's home found that her condition was very critical. There were no equipments which are required for delivery. Most importantly it was not hospital but patient's house. Again same question 'to be or not to be'. However Kavita performed delivery successfully, using instruments for eye operation. However the baby had birth asphyxia. Kavita treated the baby and saved her life. Next problem was - mother was bleeding so suturing was done with cataract instruments! But the mother could not secrete breast milk for her baby. At that time, Ashish & Kavita's son, 'Athang' was six months young. Kavita used to breast-feed Athang & that new born for initial few days. Today that milk brother of Athang is living normal life. Now many of MAHAN's village health workers are leading by examples to breast feed other babies whose mother had lactation problem. Many children are saved this way.

It's amazing to know what a tribal person can do if trained properly. Sukrai, a trained tribal village health worker, with her will power, dedication & learning, performed artificial respiration for 60 min & saved baby

suffering from birth asphyxia,

Mortality rate in children below 5 was very high. However people were reluctant to go to hospitals. This triggered to take up 'Home Based Child Care' (HBCC) Program. MAHAN developed Village Health workers (VHW) or 'Bare Foot Doctors'. Local tribal female, trained as VHW to treat 'under 5 years age children'.

Lack of doctors, facilities, equipments etc & absenteeism of doctors at govt. medical facilities and unawareness amongst tribals are few causes for poor medical services in Melghat. MAHAN along with 'KHOJ', a one more NGO from Melghat & similar like minded people, kicked off novel way of monitoring & strengthening govt facilities and encouraging patients to avail the facilities. Local Korku tribal youths were trained & appointed as counsellors in government health institutions. They act as a watch dog as well bridge between patients & doctors. One can realise its effect after visiting PHCs.

During initial period it was realized that many people suffer from various eye related problems. Unavailability of surgeon & operation facility, were main issues. In the beginning Dr. Kavita visited (carrying her 6 months old son 'Athang') more than 60 villages including remote & interior villages, schools, conducting door to door screening of patients. Patients who were in need of surgery were brought to hospital & operated upon. Till date, blindness of more than 10000 patients has been prevented. Hundreds of patients are operated for cataract surgeries, most of them are operated free of cost. Spectacles are given to thousands of students (free of cost) & people. Door to door visit-eye screening, conducted for thousands of people from 125 villages & thousands students from hundreds of schools.

Today MAHAN has well equipped eye hospital, including Operation Theatre. Every year surgery camp is organised with the help of outside ophthalmologist- Dr. Talvia, Dr. Ajay Kulkarni, Dr. Tamhne, Dr. Nagapurkar and Dr. Bapat. Phacosurgery, SICS, Strabismus surgery, Socket reconstruction & artificial eye shell, Pterygium surgery with autograft are conducted in camps. **The need is to such extend that there is lot of scope if someone wants to volunteer for this.**

Unavailability of nutritious food, poverty, unawareness of farming are few causes of malnutrition. Under the guidance of Mr. Manohar Khake, an organic agriculture consultant from Pune, who camps in Melghat for 8-10 days every month since last 4 years, kitchen gardens are developed in the backyard of the tribal huts. Till now more than 1000 kitchen gardens are developed in 17 villages of Melghat. It helped to combat the malnutrition and Vitamin A deficiency. It is planned to establish the nutrition farms in 320 acres of land in 17 villages so as to make families food secured.

In Melghat every year, hundreds of people die because of various addictions. People are addicted mainly to tobacco & local alcohol. Addiction is prevalent in ladies & youngsters also. Result of a dedication program- 'UMANG' are visible. Now people celebrate festivals without alcohol. Around 100 of people have stopped alcohol.

MAHAN's work & various initiatives are appreciated, felicitated, won awards- at various national- International level, by various govt-non govt bodies. This includes acceptance of VCDC program by 'Rajmata Jijau Mother & Child Health & Nutrition Mission' of the Maharashtra government along with UNICEF. This project has been accepted for 11 international symposiums! Today MAHAN has well constructed, well equipped hospital, OT, Ambulances. However it is never smooth sailing. Dedicated efforts were bringing success & fight both. It was fight against system, few ill elements, which were responsible for plight of this area & was getting exposed. False atrocity cases were logged against Ashish, Kavita, & MAHAN which subsequently proved to be false.

Every year summer temperature of 48 Deg & winter temp of 2-4 Deg test one's physical strength. It rains heavily, up to 1500mm, in rainy season. During rain, many times electricity, communication & transportation system collapses completely, sometimes continuously for 8-10 days. There are lots of obstacles while working in Melghat. However this couple thinks these obstacles are not hurdles in the road but a challenge to test and prove themselves. For them life is like a river. The river is more beautiful when it flows through mountains, valleys, falls, etc. Athang goes to same school where other children of that area go.

In this journey Ashish express deep gratitude towards all well wishers, supporters & staff; Abhay & Dr. Rani Bang, Dr. Prakash & Dr. Manda Amte-Mentor, Late Dr. Sushila Nair-ex-union health minister & president of Kasturba Health Society(KHS) Sewagram, Mr. Dheerubhai Mehta-present president of KHS, Rameshbhai & Nimesh Sumati of Caring friends, Mumbai are the people whose contribution, in helping MAHAN to carry on work in Melghat cannot be described, says Ashish humbly.

Members achievement

Dr. Medha PrabhuDesai presented her work on glaucoma at the American Academy of Ophthalmology's annual meet at Orlando in Oct 2011. Dr. Mahesh Dalvi (Kolhapur), Dr. Arif Adenwala (Mumbai), Dr. Anil Kulkarni (Miraj), and Dr. Parikshit Gogate were instructors for SICS at World Ophthalmology Congress 2012 Abudhabi