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Those wonderful iconoclasts and their contribution to the printing industry

Arun Mehta, former president of BMPA and the AIFMP traces the legacy which we inherit

In the 17 July 2009 issue of *PrintWeek India*, I read with interest Minoov Davar's innumerable ideas up his sleeve – one being to appoint a CEO for the print industry. It is a wonderful idea, whose time has come.

This idea is as old as the hills. It was reiterated by the doyen of printing industry – Nomanbhai Contractor in 1963. I revived his idea when I was the president of the All India Federation of Master Printers (AIFMP) in 1983. At that time, I had circulated a booklet which contained my proposal – *Looking Back, Looking Forward* – to the general council on 26-27 June 1983 in Bombay (now Mumbai).

I became an active member of BMPA in 1965 and general council member in 1969. I became president of BMPA in 1972 and president of AIFMP in 1982. I was also the chairman of development council of printing industry, a government of India appointment from 1983 to 1987.

I was fortunate that I had access to stalwarts like Nomanbhai Contractor (Rainbow Ink), Naval Ardeshir (Bolton), Amirbhai Varawalla (Mohamadi), Rusi Cama (Bombay Samachar), S Ramu, R Subbu and later there was Xerxes Desai (Tata Press), Phiroze Jhabvala (Asian), VP Bhagwat (Mouj), Karkaria (Leaders Press), Father Pereira (Examiner Press), Jagdish Parikh (Printwell), Framroze Poonawala (Comart), KC Raman (Times of India), Brig Vakil (Claridges), KC Pal (Calcutta), Nagi Reddy (Prasad, Chennai) and many others, and of course, my uncle GU Mehta.

These doyens were accessible. I sought their advice, and to my good fortune they responded with love and affection.

Print Out

When I was the president of AIFMP, I used to produce a monthly newsletter, *Print Out*. I used to print 7,000 copies at my own cost and send it to all the affiliates for free distribution among their members, so that they would be aware of the activities of the AIFMP.

When I was the president of BMPA, imports were restricted. One had to apply to the DGTD for a licence and provide justification as to why you needed a machine. If you needed a four-colour press, you got a reply after six months, which said "purchase four single-colour HMT machines!"

In 1963, Nomanbhai Contractor said 'let's have a print industry CEO'



Naturally, importing good paper was out of the question. One had to print with what was available – that is from blue white to creamish white paper. To make *Print Out* interesting I used coloured paper, as and when it was available. And so, each and every issue was printed on different coloured paper. Furthermore for every issue I used a different typeface.

When my term was over, the 12 issues became type specimen folders. A lot of printers contacted me. They hadn't retained earlier issues since they hadn't realised that it could be used as a type specimen folder. So I printed 1,000 sets for my printer friends all over India. What good fun!

Industry building

My first meeting as the chairman of development council was interesting. The council suggested to the government that a survey of the industry was essential to make recommendations. The government approved the suggestion and allocated funds for the survey. This survey was published in 1987.

In 1987, we hosted a conference and Pamex '87 in Mumbai. The venue was Nehru Centre. I was privileged to be the chairman of both the events. It was one of the most successful events which lasted for 10 days. On the last day, delegates danced in the foyer to a live band.

We had a three-day conference followed by a six-day technical conference hosted in association with GATF, whose professors flew in from Pittsburgh. In all, there were 600 participants on each and every single day. The BMPA made a profit of Rs 26-lakhs after making a handsome contribution to AIFMP. It was a lot of money in those days.

I suggested to the BMPA that as we had made a substantial profit from Pamex '87, we should re-invest it into the industry in a meaningful way. It was unanimously agreed by the BMPA to commission another survey of the printing industry. This was completed in 1990 and sponsored by the BMPA. It is sad that since then another survey has not been attempted.

A lot remains to be done – and should be done. Will we?

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AT A GLANCE ALL INDIA FEDERATION OF MASTER PRINTERS

- In 1963, Nomanbhai Contractor who was President of the AIFMP mooted the idea of a permanent Secretariat.
- BMPA published the Survey of the Print Industry in India in 1990 which was commissioned by the AIFMP. The print industry survey in 1990 was an update to the survey which was conducted in 1987.
- The AIFMP hosted the Pamex exhibition in 1983 at Pragati Maidan. The All India Printers Conference along side Pamex was inaugurated by the Vice President of India, M Hidayatullah.
- The 23rd National Awards for Print Excellence had 6000 entries and more than 250 prize winners. The Chief Guest of the evening was the President of India, Giani Zail Singh. →

