

Editorial



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Reflections on Doctors' day :

Relation of doctor with the society — A Tale of hope and despair

In Bana Parva of Mahavarata, Yaksha asked Yudhishtira 18 questions – known as **Dharma – baka Upakhanya**. Among several questions, one of them was

Yaksha : Who is the friend of one who is ill?

Yudhishtira : The physician is friend of who is ill.

“A Good Physician treats the disease; a great Physician treats the patient who has the disease”

Doctor's Day is a day which reminds us the age-old concept of Doctor-patient relationship. Doctor's Day is emotional to us being birthday of our Father of medical profession Dr B C Roy. We do not celebrate this day to show our strength and political organizational capability or to put our demands to authority. This day is rather celebrated to remind us regarding what is the expectation of the society from us and what we expect from our society. It also reminds us regarding not to deviate from the morals laid down by our father.

Doctor –patient relationship evolved over last 5000 Yrs.

Vedic Age :

Among various professions, the Physicians stand out because they are the reason of good health, happiness and ultimate survival of race. In Hindu Mythology, Vishnu is the God of Sithi (palan) and as Dhanvantari is the God of Medicine and avatar of Lord Mahavishnu - Physicians were worshiped in the Vedas. Position of Physicians were well established in period of Vedas during 5000BC. With the passage of time as civilization grew, human desires flourished in different dimensions, infatuation, ego and greed engulfed the society. The role of Physicians towards society was documented in Charak Sanhita.

Ancient Civilization :

Charaka added Physicians should be friendly towards all, having compassion for the ailing and be devoted to patients who can be cured, while accepting the inevitable in case of patients who are dying. Charaka mentioned that mere commercial spirit should not be allowed to prevail in this profession. Charaka criticized those “make merchandise of medicine” and advised “not to speak lies and backbite others”. This old literature indicates deviation from high moral laid down in the Vedic period. Our great ancestors felt that to hold society i.e. medical profession under norms meant to hold string of Lattu (spinning toy). So came the Hippocratic Oath.

Hippocratic Oath (written 5th or 6th century BC) was oldest binding documents in history regarding duty of Physicians. Physicians were bound by the Oath to treat an ill with best of his ability, preserve patient's privacy and teach secrets of medicine to next generation. Actually the Greeks developed a system of medicine based on empirico-rational approach. This was a deviation of system of Vedas where doctors were worshiped while here the Doctor-patient relationship was described based on cooperation in a democratic fashion. Hippocrates, while in one hand, established code of conduct for doctors, on the other hand, he documented the Bill of rights for patients. So Doctor patient relationship was brought down from heaven to earth, which was may be need of that period.

Dark Age :

With the fall of Roman Empire, Dark Age in Europe started. Religious predominance and supernatural

power dominated the entire Europe. Magic-religious beliefs personified in old and new Testaments were revived and became widely accepted. There was a gradual deterioration, weakening and regression of doctor – patient relationship.

In the seventeenth century, the society has lesser number of Doctors and medicine was considered as right of privileged society. Treatment was mainly symptom based and Doctors was busy to please upper class patients particularly who belongs or close to Royal/Raj family.

French Evolution :

French revolution brought a renaissance in human thought and culture throughout the world. Mankind's liberalism, equality, dignity was redefined. Thus, the nature of Doctor patient relationship changed. The model that became popularised was the Guidance – cooperation model. As a result in late 18th century, the hospitals emerged to treat the underprivileged society. At this period, there was growth of microbiological knowledge and surgical skills. New system of medicine developed, based on accurate diagnosis rather than symptom based treatment. The new model required examination of patient and anatomical knowledge of human body. So, in this model, the patient was passive and doctor became dominant.

Nineteenth Century :

In this period, the doctor patient relationship had taken a new dimension. Patient was considered as a person. The patient and the doctor were allowed to develop communication relationship. So here patient was active participant in medical practice. "The patient was not simply an object but a person, needing enlightenment and reassurance" – report of planning committee of Royal college of Physicians, London.

Twentieth Century :

There was a rapid advancement of science in this century. Empathy was partially taken away by structured scientific approach of medicine. Patients were increasingly considered as substrate, although, consumerism till then was not developed until later part of this century.

Twenty-first century :

From the later part of twentieth century consumerism started to dominate. Patients were

considered as customer. The concept of client prevailed in society. Commercialization of medical practice engulfed the ethics and modalities of medical practice. Rapid advancement of knowledge converted a physician to a technologist. Micro health predominated over macro health. Public health system had taken a back gear. Insurance based practice, evidence based practice, litigations, Consumer Protection Act, Physical assault on doctors, exuberant cost of medical care were the key issues in medical profession. Medical professionals were controlled by politicians, bureaucrats and industrialists – the physicians were converted to salaried professionals who were not allowed to take part in Policy making.

In the twentieth century, the famous novelist Manik Bandhyopadhyay described in his novel *Putul nacher Itikatha* (Story of Puppetry) - the pain of an honest doctor being a Puppet in hands of Politicians. The story depicted the transition of Doctor-society relationship from earliest twentieth century to late twentieth century.

We are in a transition phase. While on one side lies the almighty commercialization, on the other lies the morality and novelty of the profession. We are perplexed and baffled. We are not considered God. Our every action is assessed. Falling to withstand pressure of commercialization, sometimes we deviate from our Hippocratic Oath. Consumerization has thrown us into a new challenge. While on one hand, a doctor working even with the best intentions, runs the risk of getting beaten up by the public in front of camera, on the other hand there is the ever increasing legal hurdles in consumer courts, health commissions, police enquiries and criminal courts. In the developed countries, there is a clear legal difference between manslaughter and various degrees of murder but in India, there is no such difference and a doctor can be booked on murder charge merely at the words of the patient party. The media then publishes the photo of the doctor being taken to the police station and the doctor's family has to bear the brunt. Media trial starts before legal trial. For a studious doctor, who is spending his/her entire life in the pursuit of science and knowledge, this sudden face-off with police proceedings and courts shatters the entire life in one moment. Our society seems to be nonchalant to this aspect of doctor bashing and even in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic, attacks on doctors were reported frequently all over the country. Last year, a respected

elderly gynecologist was slapped in front of camera in a Calcutta hospital. But the subsequent reaction of the media and the public were ostensibly in favor of the perpetrators and a famous newspaper even commented that doctors have to be ready to face such reactions from the patient party. In a highly comedic reaction, the scene from one of Satyajit Ray's movie, "Aparajito" was invoked to justify doctor bashing by the patient party!!

Depiction of the medical profession in art and literature in India :

Art and literature in all forms have significant effect on the collective psyche of the masses. In Nazi Germany, continuous propaganda against the Jews helped to shape the public hatred against this community and led to one of the most heinous crimes against humanity. In India, over the last 5 or 10 years, a section of the media and the intelligentsia are propagating a very negative, subversive view of the medical community.

However, we think that this animosity towards doctors is not something new. This has a long tradition in India. Bonoful was a famous physician-author in Bengal. He had written many novels on the life of doctors like "Trinokhondo", "Nirmok", "Agniswar", "Erao Ache" and "Hatebajare". In these novels, the life of doctors in the first part of the twentieth century is depicted in vivid details. Since he was a physician, he had the eyes to see the jeopardies in the life of a doctor. He has written about the threats given to doctors by the patient party in villages, the numerous attempts at character assassination (one can remember a similar recent incident in Calcutta) and the frustration of doctors at the stupidity and banality of the public. This tradition of alienating doctors in the Indian society is a part of the larger trend of suspecting anything new or scientific. In the modern era of social media, this hate and anger have reached new heights. During the demonetization of India in 2016, there were numerous Facebook posts about "hidden treasure" of doctors and how they were burning their "black money". Many doctors were trolled online by name.

"Kaalbela" a famous novel in Bengali, by Samaresh Majumdar stated a lot of disparaging remarks about

the medical profession. One examples are given below:

“ কলকাতা শহরের মানুষের রোগ বোধহয় লেগেই থাকে।
এবং এতে ডাক্তাররা খুশিই হন। যদি আজ এদের
সবাই সুস্থ থাকতেন তাহলে ডাক্তারের মন কেমন থাকত?
অর্থের জন্য মানুষের মন সবসময় নিনুগামী হয়। ”

(Perhaps people in Calcutta suffer a lot from diseases. And doctors are pleased with this. ..if everyone is healthy today, would the doctor be happy? Greed for money makes them small-minded. This was written at a time when Indian doctors were actively trying to develop primary health care in remote villages.

Popular songwriter of Bengal, Nachiketa Chakraborty, once wrote a highly insulting song about the medical profession. Some lyrics from that song are quoted here to make our readers realize the level of hatred among artists in Bengal about our profession.

কসাই আর ডাক্তার একই তো নয়
কিন্তু দুটোই আজ প্রফেশান
কসাই জবাই করে প্রকাশ্যে দিবালোকে
তোমার আছে ক্লিনিক আর চেম্বার

(Butcher and doctors are similar. Butchers kill animals in the open; doctors do it in clinics and chambers.)

রোগীরা তো রোগী নয় খদ্দের এখন
খদ্দের পাঠালেই কমিশান
ক্লিনিক আর ডাক্তার কী টুপি পড়াচ্ছে
বুঝে না গর্দভ জনগণ

(Doctors now consider patients as customers. They take commission for sending customers to labs. Our public is too naïve to understand how clinics and doctors are swindling them.)

Interestingly, in spite of such egregious comments about a particular profession, Nachiketa was never held accountable for his scandalous lyrics. He enjoyed a certain degree of adulation in the media and he

performed this hate song in numerous concerts to rousing applause.

The Hindi film industry (Bollywood) is the most influential art industry in India. Whether we like it or not, Bollywood films influence a lot of people in India and shape the majority public opinion.

The 1982 film, **Bemisaal**, is centered on the life of two doctors, played by Amitabh Bachchan and Vinod Mehra. The character portrayed by Mehra is shown to be an unscrupulous doctor who wants to attain success by “hook or crook”. For this, he is shown to do unethical work for money.

In the film, **Andhadhun**, midway in the movie, there is sudden appearance of a “Dr Swami” who operates an organ trafficking ring from a peculiar dark house, with the help of two servants only. The doctor’s character is shown to be a ruthless opportunist who talks about cutting out organs from a healthy person for profit.

The 2013 Bollywood flick, Ankur Arora Murder case, is a nasty depiction of the medical profession. Kay Kay Menon portrays a senior surgeon who is shown to be rude and business oriented. His character depiction is quite unrealistic and designed to generate hatred against doctors in the hearts of the audience.

The daily newspapers of India are usually full of anti-doctor articles. Of course, there are a few favorable articles on doctors in the media. But art is mostly anti-doctor. As such, there are a very few Indian novels or movies where doctors or people of science are given the lead characters. This is in sharp contrast to the western World where there are numerous creations on the life of doctors like “House MD”, “Grey’s Anatomy”, “E.R.” and “Cardiac Arrest”. These art forms have a lot of positive aspects about the life of medical professionals. But in India, except a few obscure movies like “Anand” or “Ek Doctor ki Maut” or “Ganashatru”, there are almost no depictions of our life in the art world. If suppose an alien comes to this earth and watches Bollywood movies, it will think that India is full of people who sing and dance and fight villains on the streets with no person of science in the country.

The history of the human civilization has repeatedly proven that when a group is oppressed, it has to stand up for itself as no one else will defend it. This was true for the repressed African Americans, for the Jews in Nazi Europe and for the modern Israel. So, doctors in

India have to stand up for themselves if they want to make their lives better.

Our role in Pandemic :

Yes, Our Doctors shown their brave faces during current Pandemic. Taking risk of his own life taken challenges and more than 100 doctors sacrificed life as Martyrs in COVID –WAR. During Lockdown period when all are confined in home, only Doctors and Police Personals were in Street. Whether they got adequate protective devices, whether got adequate food, rest, remuneration – no doctor denied duty, rather jumped to rescue mankind. Definitely it was recognized by Government both Central and State – thankful to them. But in spite of giving such service there are several incidences of harassment of Health care workers in society presuming they are spreader of infection, that I pointed out in my previous editorial “Untouchability”.

Our Introspection :

But we also need some introspections. We need to think that whether we deviated from the pathway shown by Legends like Dr B C Roy, Dr Nilratan Sirkar, Dr Jibraj Mehata, or we engulfed the poison of consumerism, or we have surrendered to pressure of commercial houses.

“If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather learn to see your own faults”

— Maa Sarada

In my last editorial I described untouchability in context to society and doctors who are treating contagious diseases. But in other window we see practice of untouchability which is considered as a status symbol by a group of physicians. Here untouchability means keeping distance from doctors, not partnering his sorrows, not being his moral brother, sister, mother or father. Our doctors prefer not to respond to phone calls, not to wish during morning walks, not to attend funerals, not to attend patients apart from scheduled consultation hours. One day I visited a town near my city Kolkata in one ceremony, I asked about my friend who is endocrinologist practising in the town. The man replied that we know him, he could be some specialist, but we do not consider him a good Doctor. On asking the reason behind it, the person cited that when his father had died, he had called him up for a death certificate,

however since he was an endocrinologist, he didn't issue one. Doctor replied " I am specialist in Diabetes, go to General Doctor ". He continued saying that his father-in-law was great, citing an incident in which his grandfather was suffering from diarrhoea, and his father in law treated him the whole night sitting in their room wearing a loongi. This is a story how perception of Physicians changed in society in last 5000 yrs – From God to saviour, from saviour to friend and philosopher, from friend to service providers. We know there is vandalism, there is a prevailing myth that doctors are spreaders of infectious diseases. In London, during Cholera epidemic – popular belief were patients are taken in quarantine to learn anatomy by dissecting dead body. We know this is wrong practice in part of society, but this happened due to diminished social acceptance of a Doctor in his locality , who prefers to practice outside his neighbourhood for not to be disturbed in odd hours in residence.

Doctors and Pharmaceutical industries having an unholy relation is a whispering rumour in society. I have no proof how many doctors have really taken bribes or not and if so how much. However, I firmly believe it is also our responsibility to curb such a perception prevailing in our society, also from minds of our patients by our act. Some say physicians should prescribe generic brand only or cheapest brand only to build up confidence among our patients. However, I disagree – it is not the question of cheaper or costlier medicine or question of minimum investigations or huge investigations, it is our approach that builds up confidence in our patients about our integrity and credibility. It is the sixth sense that a patient have to smell our motive. We can prescribe a molecule being motivated by some Pharma industry, but most importantly we have to convince ourselves whatever we do, that is for the best interest of patients and for nobody else. If it happens otherwise, our patients will lose faith in our prescriptions. If patients lose faith,

regulators and lawyers will come forward to fill up the gaps.

It is just for awakening introspections, not to hurt anybody.

Our Oath in Doctors' Day :

Doctor's day is auspicious to our fraternity. The life of Dr B C Roy is a story to Physicians. We should give ourselves opportunity to look into our own act , to have a trial inside us , to pull back from a slide of hill.

He is torchbearer to our profession. Take an oath to re-establish relation of doctor and patient in society – not to a extent of God, but to prove "i am your man".

Except for a few black ships, we are dedicated to the society. It is the doctors who are sacrificing their lives in COVID battle. We are always in the battlefield, taking chances of our own lives. So why is there so much suffering, so much criticism from society. The answer lies in a conversation of Thakur Sri Ramkrishna Dev and Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekananda : Why do good people always suffer ?

Sri Ramkrishna : Diamond cannot be polished without applying friction . Gold cannot be purified without putting into fire. Good people always go through trials and hardships.

Medical Profession is a Golden Profession. Whatever be the hurdle profession will gliter.

So Call of Swami Vivekananda is relevant to our Medical Professionals in these odd days

“ARISE , AWAKE AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED”

JAI HIND BANDEMATARAM JAIBHARAT