

The Text of Address by Prof. J.S. Bajaj, Guest of Honour, NAMS at the Convocation held on 31st October, 2009, at Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj Medical University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

His Excellency Shri B.L. Joshi, the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, President, Officers, Fellows and Members of the National Academy of Medical Sciences, Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen:

I am greatly honoured by your invitation to the 49th Annual Conference of the National Academy of Medical Sciences. I take this opportunity to offer my heartiest felicitations to the recipients of Orations, Awards and Fellowship and Membership of the Academy. All of them are persons of distinction and represent the best of achievements in biomedical research, clinical professional excellence, community health care and medical education in this country. It is a most well-deserved recognition bestowed on those not only for all that they have already achieved, but also to serve as a major incentive for all that has yet to come their way.

May I respectfully draw the attention of HE the Governor to the NAMS Symposium held today : the chosen theme of 'Professional Education in Health Sciences' exhibits our deep concern regarding the quality and content of medical education in the country.

Physicians have always inspired two powerful sentiments in the contemporary society : the hope that they will create a healthier world than their forefathers without discarding fundamental values of professionalism and ethics, and the fear that they will make the things worse by following pseudoscience which is misleading, wasteful, lacking in vigilant peer review, and advocated by drug and devices industry. Medical education must aim to facilitate professionalism, and at the same time discourage medical adventurism. National Academy of Medical Sciences is committed to enhance ethical practices and demonstrate a high degree of professionalism through its Members and Fellows.

The basic role of the content of medical education as presently imparted in Medical and Health Universities & Institutions must be viewed in the context of social relevance and the societal needs, rather than purely in terms of technological advances. While the science of medicine presents advances in knowledge, social and behavioural sciences effectively contribute to development of requisite aptitude and essential attitude to meaningfully interpret societal needs and effectively use health as an entry point of social, economic, and community development. Indeed, if medicine has to respond to the new challenges, it must generate such social environment in the medical schools that would specifically change the students' future behaviour in terms of the anticipated role of the physician as a catalyst of much needed social transformation. The teaching and learning of medicine must take into cognizance educational concerns about the ethical values that the medical students need to acquire as a part of their undergraduate and postgraduate education. The ethical dilemmas not only emerge as a result of psycho-social evolution, but also relate to technological advances of modern medicine: stem cell research is an illustrative example. While the ideals of the dignity of man and the social interdependence of human community may seem utopian, there is undoubtedly a need to humanize medicine while preserving its intrinsic scientific core.

The host institution, the Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj Medical University, has its foundation in a century old institution that has been a witness to not only major advances in medicine but also to a great social transformation. Thanks to the generous donations of several philanthropists and the contribution of the Government of India, the foundation stone of this medical institution was laid on the 26th December, 1905 by the then Prince of Wales. The famous architect, Sir Swinton Jacob, designed the building in Indo- Saracenic style, so as to make it blend naturally with the Islamic architecture of minarets and monuments of this city. The Medical College was inaugurated in October, 1911 by Sir John Prescott Hewett, the then Lt. Governor of United Provinces. Since 1916, the topper of the final professional examination is decorated with Hewett Medal. To commemorate the visit to India of King George V, Emperor of India, and Queen Mary in 1911, the College was named King George Medical College and Associated Hospitals.

While visiting the historical exhibits, I was impressed with the galaxy of Hewett Medal winners, starting with Dr. K.S. Nigam, the first Hewett medalist. We must honour illustrious alumni of this institution and draw inspiration from their professional and scientific contributions. At the same time, Excellency, permit me also to share another glimpse of history of our struggle for independence, which is interwoven into the social fabric of the city of Lucknow. Although I had visited this city several times in the past, I could never redeem my pledge to visit Kakori and pay a personal homage to those whose sacrifices need to be remembered and revered. As there are a large number of colleagues from different part of the country assembled here, may I crave the indulgence of HE the Governor of UP and give a brief perspective.

Kakori is a small village, about 12 Kms. from Lucknow, located on the railway line connecting Shahjahanpur with this city. It was at this location that Number 8 Down train was stopped in the evening of 9 August, 1925 by pulling the chain, and about Rs. 8,000/- of the government treasury was taken away by a determined group of revolutionaries. The planning was meticulous and its success shook the British empire. Chandrashekhar Azad evaded arrest till he was surrounded by police in a park in Allahabad on 27 February, 1931 and shot himself to maintain his dignity and without surrendering his freedom. Of the others, Ramprasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan, Rajendra Lahiri and Thakur Roshan Singh were tried and sentenced to death while five others were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. To me they symbolize the pinnacle of the glorious tradition of diversity and unity of India. Ramprasad Bismil was a Brahmin; Ashfaqulla Khan was a Muslim; and Roshan Singh was a Thakur. Yet they were united in life for the sole purpose of attaining India's independence and died together for the same cause. On the 18th December, 1927, Rajendra Lahiri was hanged; Ramprasad Bismil and Ashfaqulla were hanged on the 19th December and Thakur Roshan Singh on the 20th December, 1927. On the 19th December, 1983, fifty-six years after the martyrdom of the revolutionaries, Smt. Indira Gandhi laid the foundation stone of 'Kakori Shahid Smark', and a memorial has been built close to the spot where the train was stopped.

Yesterday, I undertook the pilgrimage to the Shahid Smark to pay a silent homage to those who made it possible for all of us to be proud citizens of a free and independent India. The place inside was dark as the electric bulbs were not replaced for the last several years, and the building was surrounded by pigeons' droppings and layers of dust as no safai karamchari has been deputed. Tall grass has grown all over the place making it difficult to walk upto railway track. Sir, how can a nation be so ungrateful? We award Hewett Medal but forget Ramprasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan, Rajendra Lahiri and Roshan Singh!

Excellency, if we have to inculcate a sense of dedication and devotion for the service of the people amongst our medical graduates, it is important to ensure that they imbibe the values, traditions and scarifies of the revolutionary spirit of struggle for independence. A Ramprasad Bismil Ward in department of Medicine, an Ashfaqulla Ward in Surgery, a Roshan Singh Ward in Ophthalmology, and a Rajendra Lahiri Ward in Pediatrics, will serve as a constant reminder of their glorious sacrifice, inspiring a sense of devotion and dedication amongst a generation of students and doctors. Their education and learning in such hallowed environment will be equally, if not more, valuable and cherished than any prize or medal named after former British masters. It will also illustrate how a blend of academic excellence with a sense of profound dedication can impart social relevance and make the practice of medicine both a science and an art.

I gratefully acknowledge the honor done to me and thank you for sympathetic hearing.