Breaking Out And Taking Sides: A Reflection On Nursing Education

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The educational system of a society is a reflection of the given socio-cultural and political structure of that society. Having emerged from this structure, the educational process bases its values and purposes essentially to reinforce and strengthen this structure in turn. The existing structure in India is characterised by inequity and oppression. The values underlying the present educational process also reflect this character. The product of this educational process assimilates the values underlying this process, and carries them over into various professions where it is utilised. The nursing education, being a part of this larger educational process, is subject to these very values, limitations and forces.

The health care system in our country is again highly oppressive and sustains itself upon active support of the State. The oppressive values of the power structure are carried over to the health care system as well since it evolves and is continuously subjected to this powerful manipulative force. As a result, the health profession becomes an active participant in this exploitative system. The nursing community, being an integral and vital part of the larger health care system, is subject to the same oppressive tendencies that dominate the health care system, both as a profession and as women.

From the above, it follows that a change in the nursing education and profession is not possible in isolation. Changes will occur in line with the changes in the socio-political system in which they function. Attempts at reforms in isolation would at best remain a rhetoric in self-deception, meaningless and hollow. A meaningful attempt at changes in society would occur in society through strong socio-political forces emerging from the people, i.e., from the grassroots. Similarly, meaningful changes in the health care system, and for that matter in the nursing profession, would occur in association with the emergence of such strong socio-political forces of change.

The relevant questions that need to be asked are: what are the emerging socio-political situations; what forces of change are emerging in what forms; what aspirations are articulated; what short-term and long-term issues are addressed to, and what slogans are held high. Those desirous of such a change need to consciously associate, involve, identify and gradually merge with such forces of change in tune with the stage of growth of such forces. The nursing profession, an oppressed segment in the health care structure, should increasingly identify itself with such liberative forces within the health care system itself, as well as in the society in general. Certain relevant questions, howsoever hard and painful they may be, that need to be asked now, are:

- The nursing profession is dominated by women, and the medical profession by men. The patriarchal system of India society ensures the domination of the major ity nurses by the minority doctors in the health care structure, even though the plain truth is that management of patients and health care facilities are provided by the nurses. Function and numerical significance of the nursing profession has as yet not ensured the profession any significant right to decision making in the health care structure. The question arises as to what the nursing community and the organisations of nurses are doing to break this male domination and control? How are they responding to women's issues and rights in the society in general?

- For quite some time, hoarse voices have been heard that for a health care system to be meaningful, the focus should move away from curative services to primary health care, and from hospital care to community health. This shift in focus also implies the increasing role of the nursing profession. Should "Health for All by 2000" be permitted to be "curative centres for all by2000"? What is the nursing profession doing to resist this miserable trend?

- The concept that health is a commodity which can be bestowed or sold is the prevailing concept. The drug industry reinforces it and has been able to bear a strong influence on the medical profession. The famous Lentin Commission hearings, or the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare not having the deciding rights to the drug policy of our country are noteworthy in this context. Does the Nursing profession see this as none of their business? What are the

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nurses doing to shatter the commodification of health care?

- It is well known that a mere increasing of health facilities, manpower and programmes does not provide a commensurate return in improving the health status of the people. Is the nursing profession succumbing to the temptation of yielding to the vested interests by supporting the myth of increase in health facilities, manpower and programmes?
- It is also well known that any improvement in the health status of the people is due to nutritional, environmental and economic conditions rather than by a mere improvement in medical sciences and health care services. As it stands the nutritional, environmental and economic conditions in India are systematically deteriorating and as a consequece, our health status is deteriorating in real terms, attempts to prove otherwise notwithstanding. What is the nursing profession's outlook to this emerging crisis?
- There is an emergence of increasing dissatisfaction at the grassroots in general. There is also an increasing disenchantment with the existing political process. Newer forces are emerging every where, questioning the status quo. Do the nurses, as an oppressed group, envisage a role in strengthening the forces of change?
- The nursing profession emphasises the care part of health delivery system. The technocratic approach in health care is essentially against the basic tenets of nursing values. But, the techno cratic approach (what with the now famous technology missions) to health care problems, both in hospitals and primary health care structures, is being enforced with vengeance, disregarding opera tional viability or human concerns. Is the nursing profession taking a position and resisting this dangerous shift?

These and many other questions need to be attempted and answered by the nursing profession since it has always been valued by society. It is in this context that the nursing education and changes in it are to be perceived and processes set in motion for an evolution of the future perspective in nursing education.