

Growth of Nursing in India

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IN order to understand a profession in its true perspective a knowledge of its past history is essential. The origin and the spirit of our activities in the past will enable us to appreciate the present trends of our profession and guide us to plan our future and make surer progress. For convenience our glorious past can be divided into three parts: ancient Indian nursing; the beginning of modern nursing, and the growth and development of Indian nursing.

The earliest account of Medicine in India is found in the **Rig Veda** which is dated 2000 B.C. There is mention of two diseases in the **Rig Veda**—"Phthisis" and Leprosy. The other records are found in the **Atharva Veda** which the historians date as 700 B.C. However, the most important records are the **Susratha Samhita** and **Charakka Samhita**. Susratha was the great Indian surgeon whom historians say practised in 700 B.C. before Hippocrates. Some of the methods he described seem modern especially those in plastic surgery. His method of cleansing and sterilization of operating rooms and instruments, technique for caesarian section, plastic surgery, cranial surgery and eye operations were of a very high standard.

There is a popular belief that ancient Indian doctors attributed the cause of diseases to spirits, ghosts and demons. This belief is not true as Susratha in his book **Susratha Samhita** defined disease as that which proved 'to torment or pain' man.

He described about 1000 instruments and their uses in his book. Later excavations at Taxila carried out between 1923 to 1934 by the then British Govt. confirmed the existence and uses of those instruments. Historians date Taxila remains as between 300 to 100 B.C. The findings of the excavations are available to us in three huge volumes.

These records are archeological proofs of the glory of ancient Indian medicine. In **Haritha Samhita** which is believed to be a century older than **Susratha Samhita**, we come across the circulation of blood, while describing how anaemia (**Panduroga**) is caused: it says that it is caused by eating clay which blocks the lumen of veins and obstructs the circulation. Though it looks funny for us, it throws light on their knowledge of physiology and their linking anaemia with less blood supply. In **Bhagavat Purana** we come across the association of rats with plague. There are also ample records by Susratha on anatomy, physiology and paediatrics both curative and preventive aspects. The ancient Indian doctors stressed the prevention rather than cure of diseases, of course on the curative aspects there were some elements of religion such as offerings to dieties, prayers and meditation in addition to herbs and medicines which can be termed as a form of psychotherapy. **Dr. Hirschberg of Berlin** says "the whole plastic surgery in Europe took a new flight when these devices of Indian workmen became known to us."

Charakka was the great Indian Physician. His work is called **Charakka Samhita**. Historians date Charakka as belonging to fifth century B.C. In ancient India there were hospitals all over the country called the "the halls of healing". We have a very good account of their construction and equipment in Ayurvedic manuscripts. High moral standards were set up for those who attended on the sick. They had to get the king's permission to practice medicine which bears an analogy with the present day state registration. Compulsory hygienic measures were adopted. Their knowledge of vaccination against smallpox was universally accepted even by western authors as J.Z. Holwell, F.R.S., in a paper read before the Royal College of

Physicians, in London in 1967.

Indian medicine rose to very high position during the Buddhist period (550 B.C. 300 A.D.) Buddhist monks attended on the sick. Monastic universities were established at Taxila and at Nalanda. These universities taught medical sciences. They had about 100 lecture halls and more than thousand students from all over South East Asia. Emperor Asoka, in 250 B.C. established a number of hospitals not only for men but also for animals. Emperor Buddha Dasa established a state Medical Service and appointed one doctor for every ten villages. However, surgery declined during Buddhist period due to their philosophy of not killing or cutting. Drugs and herbs were grown in pharmaceutical gardens. The Buddhist period is considered to be the golden age of Indian Medicine.

In **Charakka Samhita** in addition to doctors and nurses we come across two other categories of hospital workers namely servants and companions. The companions was required to have the qualifications as singing, talents in music, story-telling and other ways of keeping the patient's attention diverted. This corresponds to the modern diversional therapy.

In addition to archeological and epigraphic proofs we have got the recordings of foreign visitors. The most quoted observations are that of FA HIAN AND HOUN TSANG. They confirmed the existence of charitable institutions in ancient India—hospitals, dispensaries, '**Punniya Sala**' or charity houses.

The most remarkable account is found in our Thirukurukal regarding Medicine in verse 950. Thiruvalluvar defines medicine as consisting of patients, doctors, drugs and male nurses. He says that the above are the four pillars of Medicine. The interesting point about Thiruvalluvar is that he gives first place for the patients and his theory is patient-centred. Parimelalagar, the prose interpreter of Thirukurukal, defines the male nurse as the person who remains with the patient and gives drugs in proper doses.

Nursing in Ancient India

Establishing the greatness of ancient Indian Medicine it can conveniently and theoretically be proved that Nursing in ancient India was remarkably advanced. Nursing was "professionally" advanced, universally recognised and respected. Men did nursing and only in special cases women were appointed. In ancient India the nurse was trained in all fields of medical sciences. Miss A. Wilkinson in her pioneering work "A Brief History of Nursing in India and Pakistan" says "there are more details of nursing in the old Indian records than in those of any other country in the world."

Sushratha in his 34th Chapter defines the ideal relationship of doctors, nurses, patients and medicine as the four feet upon which a cure must rest. He describes the "nurse as a pillar when he is good hearted, when confidence can be placed on him and when he exactly follows the physician's order". Susratha about 2700 years ago gave a respectable position for his nurse as a useful and essential member for his success. The greatest Indian Physician Charakka describes the qualification of a nurse in his ninth chapter as "knowledge of the manner in which drugs should be prepared or compounded for administration, cleverness, devotedness to the patient waited upon and purity (both of mind and body) are the four qualifications of the attending nurse." The above statements show that the nurse was a skilled person with adequate training in systematic and professional manner. No one could have acquired those qualities without a professional training. The methods of their training are not known and there are no recorded proofs on the subject.

The Beginning of Modern Nursing

The Modern Nursing began in India with the establishment of British rule by the East India Company.

Madras : In 1764 a large number of English soldiers stationed at Madras fell sick. Though there were a number of doctors in the

East India Company there were no nurses or hospitals. When soldiers fell sick the agent of the company rented a building and appointed some 'people' to attend on the sick. The 'people' were no other than fellow soldiers. As this building became insufficient, another house was transformed into a hospital in 1775 at the present North West Esplanade. This was transferred to the present Govt. General Hospital, Madras. Another hospital was opened in 1768 with public contribution in Madras. Both these hospitals treated military and civil personnel. Another hospital was established in 1797—Lying-in Hospital. It was here that the Govt. sanctioned the training school for Midwives. The Certificate granted was a Diploma in Midwifery. If a candidate failed to obtain a Diploma in Midwifery she was given a "certificate in sick Nursing." Presumably the standard of Training was very poor in sick Nursing. The Madras Govt. sanctioned the scheme for training 6 nurses at Govt. General Hospital, Madras and the school was started in July 1871 with 6 Diploma Midwives to take Training in General Sick Nursing. The first matron Miss Martyn was appointed in 1874. To start with there were only 6 probationers who had training for a period ranging from three to six months.

Bombay : There were three hospitals in Bombay by 1784 but only Europeans were treated. Another hospital for the Indians was opened in 1809. The Jamset Jee Jujeebhoy Hospital (J.J. Hospital) was founded in 1843 for Indians. There was no provision for Nursing care in this hospital. In 1878 the Sisters of the Anglican Community of All Saints came from England. A part of their work was to visit the patients in the hospitals. Their services were so much appreciated that the Govt. of Bombay approached them for undertaking nursing of all patients. In response to this a batch of trained nurses came and served the patients. They soon realised the importance of training Indian women in nursing. Accordingly Indian women were trained with the help of these

Sisters. The first Indian lady to have the courage of coming forward was Baikaishi Bai sent by the Thana Municipality in 1891. To start with, the period of training was only for two years but later extended to three years.

Calcutta and Delhi : The first hospital at Calcutta was opened in 1707 at Fort William. The Calcutta Medical College Hospital was opened in 1838. In 1876 the building of Nurses quarters was sanctioned. In 1882 a full training school for nurses and midwives was started by the Sisters of the Anglican Community. In Delhi the Lady Hardinge Medical College Hospital was founded in 1911. It was the first medical school for women in India. The training school for nurses was started here in 1915.

Christian Missions

The contribution of Christian Missions to nursing in India is incomparable. Mission Hospitals were established all over India in the 19th century. Training Indian nurses both in English and in vernacular medium was started. In 1872 a class for Indian nurses was started in Delhi and at the end of two years they were examined by the civil surgeon who gave certificates to the successful candidates. A scheme was adopted at Lucknow, Banaras, and Patna to regularise and standardise Nurses Training. In 1909 a conference of Nursing and Medical superintendents was held and this resulted in the formation of "The North India United Board of Examiners for Mission Hospitals". Later many Govt. Hospitals too joined this board. This resulted in the coordination of Nurses training in North India. In the meantime in Madras Presidency the Nursing Superintendents of mission hospitals came to the conclusion as their counterparts in the North. This led to the formation of "The South India and Mid-India Board of Nurse Examiners." This regulated the nurses training in mission hospitals on all-India basis. Miss Wilkinson has rightly said : "The first attempt to organise systematic training of Nurses and Public

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