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INTRODUCTION

Dr Nagendra Nath De is an important figure in the history of Indian Psychiatry though little is known about him. Even before reading this article I am sure many of us only knew a single phrase 'first editor' of Indian journal of Psychiatry' about him. I have tried to highlight many untold contributions of Dr De.

EDUCATION AND CREDENTIALS

He was born on 25th January, 1896 in a remote village Dahuka in the district of Burdwan. After getting his primary and secondary education he came to Calcutta and passed his Matriculation in the year of 1914. In 1916 he was admitted in Calcutta Medical College and awarded Abdul Goni Scholar for his brilliant academic career. He completed his graduation in 1922 with 4 gold, 2 silver, and many other medals.

Malaria, Kala-azar, Cholera and Tuberculosis were prevailing diseases in Bengal as well as in our country at that time. Young Dr De devoted his life in the service of human suffering. He had always been attached to laboratories where he worked on many interesting scientific subjects relating to those diseases. He was head of Anti malaria

brigade of Central Co operative Anti Malaria Society in Calcutta. Sonar Bangla, a publication about awareness of epidemics of Bengal was one of his great efforts. In 1925, Dr De was appointed as a Bacteriologist in Calcutta Corporation. His work in association with World Health Association had given immense satisfaction to the public. Dr De started working as Honorary visiting physician of Tuberculosis Association of Bengal in 1933.

Next year he got married to Madhabilata. They had two sons and a daughter. His younger son was Dr Bimal De, who became an eminent psychiatrist of Calcutta later on. He acquired Diploma in Tropical Medicine from School of Tropical Medicine in 1935. This time he inclined towards Psychology and psychiatry. So he joined Psychological Clinic of Carmichael / R.G Kar Medical College and came in close contact of legendary Dr Girindra Sekhar Bose. Influenced by Dr Bose, Dr De proceeded to U.K. and completed his Diploma in Psychological Medicine from London in 1937 and MRCP in 1939 and came back to India just before the 2nd World War. Returning to India, Dr De concentrated his work on mental health not only on treatment but also its awareness and its teaching which was in a sprouting stage in India. He served as a teacher in Carmichael Medical College and as Honorary visiting

Psychiatrist and Neurologist at Calcutta Medical College and chaired head till 1959. Dr De also worked as post graduate teacher at Calcutta University Science College from 1945 to 1961 and in Calcutta National Medical College in 1951. During this time he organised the postgraduate D.P.M. course in University College of Medicine of Calcutta and became the first head of this department. He was also associated with various hospitals like Lumbini Park hospital, Shambhu Nath hospital, Bhawanipore Mental Observation Ward, Indian Mental Welfare Association, Dr Girindra Sekhar Bose clinic, etc. The West Bengal and Bihar Govt had appointed him as specialist member in multiple committees like

- a) Advisory Committee, Hospital for Mental Diseases, Ranchi
- b) Selection Committee for Award for Fellowships and Scholarships, Health services of Govt of West Bengal.
- c) Medical Referee, Labour Dept, Govt of West Bengal.

Apart from this the Govt of India also appointed him as a member of Sub-committee of the Medical Council of India for drafting the curriculum of medical colleges in India. Since 1942, Dr Nagendra Nath was life member of Indian psychoanalytical Society, which was the Indian division of International psychoanalytical Society. He was the only Spokesman of International Federation of Medical Psychotherapy which used to publish from New York and Switzerland and only Indian collaborator of Acta Psychotherapeutica et Psychosomatica.

CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN PSYCHIATRY

Indian Association for Mental Hygiene was founded in 1929 by Owen Berkeley Hill. In 1935, the Indian division of the royal Medico-Psychological Association was formed due to the efforts of Dr. Banarasi Das. In 1946, Dr. Nagendra Nath De along with Major R. B. Davis of the Hospital for Mental disease, Kanke, Ranchi & brigadier T. A. Munro,

Advisor in Psychiatry to the Indian Army decided to revive the association. Due to their efforts the Indian Psychiatric Society was inaugurated at Delhi on 7th January 1947. Dr. N. N. De presided over the first annual meeting of the association on 2nd January 1948 at Patna.

In the second Annual General Body meeting of the IPS at Allahabad on January 1st and 2nd, 1949, it was decided to bring out an official publication of the IPS under the editorship of Nagendra Nath De in the name of "Indian Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry,". The journal was a huge success in its inaugural year with four issues published well on time from Kolkata. From the very beginning the journal followed patterns used in reputed international journals containing sections such as editorial, original articles, reviews, news and abstracts. The referencing style conformed to that used in Quarterly Cumulative Index Medicus.

An example of membership drive in Indian Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry

All medical practitioners in India and Pakistan and others interested in the neurological and mental diseases and the progress of mental health service in India and Pakistan are requested to be members of Indian Psychiatric Society,

Application forms are obtainable from The Honorary Secretary,

INDIAN PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY,
P.O. - Kanke
Dt. - Ranchi. BIHAR

Many of Dr De's thoughts reflected on those topics are relevant even today. What is most remarkable is that in his earliest writings, he emphasized the need for mental health research. Some of the titles of his articles are: 'psychiatric research'; 'new drugs and psychiatric treatment'; 'newer methods of treatment'; 'is preventive psychology a tangible project?'; 'psychiatry in India'.

Dr De (1949-1951) in his first editorial dealt with the opportunities in psychiatric research in India, opening his remarks with, "Research is the life of Science. A Science is living only as long as research is carried out in it". And "sympathetic attitude from the Government is necessary for carrying out these researches and for raising the status of psychiatry in the country".⁶ The second editorial spoke about medical education in India. His far sightedness proposed the ways towards improvements of overall medical education along with psychological and psychiatric teaching in India." The best way of teaching the subject, according to him, was by dividing the courses into small portions and spreading them over the three years of training in the college. The following is the tentative scheme, which may be followed with advantages :

Years 1 and 2

Relation between mind and body, between doctor and patient, between different individuals at home, at school at place of work or elsewhere and how that relation may influence health of the mind or the body or both.

Normal psychology and its integration with the anatomy and physiology of humanbody.

Years 2 and 3

Psychopathology, mental mechanisms, their variations in health and in disease. Integration with pharmacology showing the action of different drugs on the mind.

Year 3

Psychoses and Mental Deficiencies

Year 4

Psychoneuroses

Year 5

Revision and Legal aspects of mental diseases- certification, inquisition, criminal responsibility, testamentary capacity etc."

In the Editorial of 4th issue of 1949, Dr De mentioned the limitations of "Indian Lunacy Act". So he wrote "It is high time that this Act is replaced by a new Act with ample provision for treatment of all forms of mental diseases, deficiency, delinquency etc with easier and prompter methods of admission into mental hospital. There should also be provision for running mental wards in the general hospitals specially the teaching hospitals so that prospective medical people may be taught about mental disease in these wards".

The first year had an extensive review article titled "Mental Health Services in India" by N. N. De. Most of the papers published then dealt with theoretical issues with a strong inclination towards psychoanalysis and other disciplines of psychology.

Dr De could only think even in those times, "The root of all social pathology and discontent lies hidden in the abnormal mind of the individual. Social improvement is not possible when the individual is neglected and uncared for. Hence, in the interest of social welfare, it is essential to improve the mental well being of each and every individual. This can only be achieved by keeping a constant vigilance on the life of an individual right from his birth all through infancy, childhood, adolescence and during the choice of a career as well as in the climacteric period and convalescence from illness." So he said in Editorial of 4th issue of 1949, "In India if we build up such small units of trained workers and send them to different parts of the country they would be able to radiate their healthy influence in small circles, mopping up the misery, suffering and discontent of many a mentally afflicted person. But psychiatrists, unlike religious workers, cannot be expected to do philanthropic works all the time, nor can their mission be fulfilled when they do not get reasonable response and substantial support from the Government. Not mere prevention of disease but promotion of the optimum health and well-being of each and every one should be our ultimate goal."

The first systematic interventional study carried out by Dr De was a case series of histamine and insulin treatment of schizophrenia in 1950. Dr De reported the use of Rauwolfiaserpentina as a tablet form in two patients with paranoia which was published in 2nd vol of journal in 1950. He served as the editor for 2 years with great enthusiasm but publication was stopped in 1954 just to reappear with its current name Indian Journal of Psychiatry in 1958 and Lt. Col. Bardhan, a pathologist, was appointed as its editor.

DR DE WAS ALSO THE EDITOR OF :

1. Indian Journal of Psychotherapy
2. Samiksa Journal of Indian Psychoanalytical society

HIS IMPORTANT PUBLICATIONS INCLUDE

1. Blood Picture in Recent Kala-azar and Old Malaria cases - a method of distinguishing them - Ind. Med. Record, June 1932
2. Common obsession in Bengal, Indian Science Congress, 1943
3. Marriage and Mental Disease. Calcutta Medical Journal, July 1945
4. Indian Lunacy Act. Indian Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry, Editorial, vol. 1, No. 4, 1949
5. Mental Health service in India. Indian Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry, Editorial, vol. 1, No. 1-4, 1949.
6. Psychiatric Research. Indian Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry, Editorial, vol. 1, No. 1, 1949.
7. Medical Education in India. Indian Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry, Editorial, vol. 1, No. 2, 1949.
8. Effects of an Attack of Filarial Fever on the Course of Parkinsonism. Indian Journal of

Neurology and Psychiatry, vol. 1, No. 3, 1949.

9. Histamine and Insulin Treatment of Schizophrenia. Indian Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry, Editorial, vol. 11, No. 2, 1950
10. The Newer Methods of Treatment. Indian Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry, Editorial, vol. 11, No. 2, 1950
11. Two cases of paranoia treated with RauwolfiaSerpentina. Indian Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry, Editorial, vol. 11, No. 2, 1950
12. New Drugs and the Nervous System. Indian Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry, Editorial, vol. 11, No. 1, 1950.
13. The Unconscious in Hysteria. Samiksa, Journal of Indian Psycho-analytical Society, Vol. 1, No. 4. 1947.

This is a short list along with many other publications in psychiatry, Neurology, Medicine, Mental Health and Hygiene, Therapeutics and Toxicology. In his memory, Indian Association of Social Psychiatry approved Dr N N De Oration Award in 1991. This award is declared one year in advance at every annual conference of the Indian Association of Social Psychiatry.

Apart from his great professional, academic and organizational career, Dr De helped many people / organizations open heartedly. Ultimately Dr Nagendranath De passed away in 1977 in Calcutta but he will remain alive in the history of Indian Psychiatric Society and Indian Journal of Psychiatry.

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