

REMINISCENCE

S.K. Basu

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had every thing before us, we had nothing before us...

(Charles Dickens: A Tale of Two Cities)

As we complete 25 years of our existence, it's time to fondly look back and reconstruct our own story; a time to relive those moments of trials and tribulations, of hardships and anxieties, our successes and failures; in short cherish the days gone by.

I still remain uncertain whether this attempt of recreating our own story is the effect of nostalgia for the past or an intention to find a role model for the present or may be an effort to provide an ideological framework for the future. You may even take it as an exercise of homage, a tribute to the anniversary year to celebrate, to honor or to commemorate the event.

So let's take a walk down the memory lane and experience what it took to make Rural Medicare Society's mere 3 bedded hospital germinated in a godown of a dingy lane of Mehrauli to a multi-specialty 25 bedded hospital at village Saidul Ajaeb with its ever widening versatile activities.

During my schooldays, one of my teachers used to tell me "Dreams are echoes of ourselves, our own thoughts, foresights and our own voice, coming back to us in a different language"

Indeed the very foundation of Rural Medicare Society was based on the dream of a group of socially committed doctors and social scientists. They conceived the thoughts and had the wisdom to make a beginning of a health care delivery system, with the sole objective of meeting and catering to the health care needs of the economically less privileged people, who live on the margin of communities; and yet can buy the expertise with dignity across the counter at an affordable cost. Thus was the humble beginning of Rural Medicare Society and its 3-bedded small hospital, Rural Medicare Centre (RMC) in 1976, born in a hired godown of a cramped, mephitic bi-lane of Mehrauli.

Our odyssey commenced from here. The doyens at the forefront were Dr. J. K. Banerjee, Mr. Prabhat Mukherjee, Mr. Arvind Das, Dr. Jharna Sen, Dr. Shipra Banerjee and a few more who initiated this unique journey under the chairmanship of Prof. Nitish De and Mr. Prabhat Mukherjee as its founder secretary.

To start with, the set up of our centre was a unique one; consultation fees of rupees five only; a make shift out patient department allowing barely three patients to sit

at a time, formed by converting the front portion of the godown; an indoor department shaped out of transforming the rear part of the godown and a small operation theatre cum laboratory created by chiseling out the front portion with a wooden partition.

"*Sui generis*" indeed. I still remember the thrill of performing the first cesarean section on a diabetic mother in a 6x9 feet operation theatre. I must admit that the act was not without its share of trepidation as infrastructure at that time was virtually non-existent. Neither did we have the requisite number of colleagues to give us the much required encouragement and moral support. Dr. Banerjee, my self and Dr. Gurjeet Singha team of three, a good number though. Dr. J. Trikha and Dr. Shashi Ghosh joined us after couple of months.

Initial few years of the Society's activities were mainly restricted to curative work which helped us to gain the confidence of the community. Those were also the years of fresh thinking, experimenting with our strategies to give the Society a shape and identity, planning new projects for the future activities, framing the constitution and the memorandum of the Society, trying to collaborate with other NGOs, making efforts to understand more and more of the community's need, consolidating our position into the community and participating in their activities. In short, this was a great learning period for all of us. This, in a way, gave us an insight that in a poverty stricken and cast ridden Society where basic social amenities and health awareness is abysmally poor, perhaps curative care alone is not the only effective tool to solve the health problems of the community. We realized that as we cure their illness, we need to encourage wellness; we need to promote preventive and promotive health care as well.

Thus the concept of starting an extension centre of RMC among the poor stone quarry workers at village Mandi got crystallized. Extension Centre at village Mandi was born in '81 beneath the open sky, under the shadow of a *Babul* tree. The modest charpoy, which was incidentally the only piece of furniture available to us, was used as a patients' examination table, doctor's chair-table and a medicine dispensing rack- all rolled in one. Dr. Shipra Banerjee took the initiative, others followed suit. Simultaneously health worker training program was started and the concept of "paramedic" was evolved.

Mandi Pahari did not have any existing health care facility at that time. Night blindness, malaria, infected wounds, malnutrition etc were rampant among the quarry workers. Financial exploitation by middle men, castism, and lack of basic amenities like drinking water made their life miserable, a deprived lot. RMC's presence infused new hope and confidence amongst the quarry workers as we not only catered to their health care needs but also took up their social problems.

Quick recovery from illness helped quarry workers to go back to their work in time, earn their daily wages and come out of the clutches of financial debt from middle men and money lenders which they were so long accustomed to. Health education became an on going process. Medicines and vaccines were provided free of cost. However a token fee of 0.50p was charged from each patient to discourage them from misusing our services. At this juncture cooperation of Action India, a Delhi based NGO, was very useful to us.

Perhaps the turning point in our Society's annals was the shifting of our 3 bedded hospital to a nearby single storied dilapidated building in 1981 after necessary renovation and restoration work. RMC soon became a fully functional 11 bedded hospital providing 24 hours of emergency service within a short span of 4 years. Like minded doctors from various discipline started joining us. We started growing. And growth also means expansion. Soon RMC emerged as a multi disciplinary hospital with facilities for medicine, surgery, pediatrics, ophthalmology, ENT, obstetrics and gynecology. Laboratory, x-ray and a small pharmacy were set up. A full fledged operation theatre with basic equipments for both minor and major surgery started functioning. It continued to provide curative services to the people at a very cheap rate. Much needed family planning services were provided to the patients free of costs. During this remarkable period of unbridled growth and expansion, unfortunately for us, the president of our Society Prof Nitish De passed away. His sudden and untimely death created a void. This demanding position remained unoccupied for quite sometime.

1987-88 was a very significant mile stone in the history of Rural Medicare Society. With the generous grant from NORAD of the Royal Norwegian Embassy, the hired building of RMC was purchased, brushed up and extended; converted into the Official headquarters for the Society. Our thanks to Mr. Halle Hansen and his wife Maritt Bergravve of the embassy for making it happen.

It is in this year that another extension centre providing primary health care services was opened at Rangpuri village in collaboration with Institute of Social sciences. The centre was started to cater to the health care needs

of more than 2000 stone quarry workers. Late Mr. Inder Mohan (PadmaBhusan) and Dr. George Mathew of ISS provided us the much needed financial help. Mr. Inder Mohan was a member and true well wisher of the Society and a great social worker.

A new governing body was formed with Prof. S.N.Mitra as the new chairman of the Society. The void created by sudden death of Prof. Nitish De was filled up. Prof Mitra framed a new constitution based on the memorandum of the Society. From the very beginning he made enormous efforts to acquire a piece of land for a 25 bedded hospital at the nearby Sultanpur village. The Society also extended the basic training in health care services to the community health workers from other NGOs like People Institute for Development & Training (PIDIT), Sahjauna and Institute of Social Science. Workers from nearby Jaunapur, Rangpuri, Dhulsares villages and from far off Goalpara district of Assam joined in this training program. All of them were nominated by the village panchayat of their respective areas.

1987 also witnessed a spurt of visitors from abroad to RMC. Each one of them was a distinguished achiever in his/her field. Few of the distinguished names were Hege Araldson, Medical Anthropologist from Norway, Ann Solveig – Public Health Nurse, Dr. Berit AustVeg, Per Stavnum – Counselor NORAD, Dr. Sigrun Mogedal etc. Dr. Sigrun, during his stay, gave us a very enlightening talk on "Politics and primary health care". The year also marked the beginning of the visits by many foreign medical students at our centre from various European universities, Scandinavian countries and other part of the world to gain experience in primary health care. This trend continued in the subsequent years.

The steady commitment of the consultants helped the Society to further strengthen its roots within the community in the subsequent years. They worked doggedly towards Society's singular aim of catering to the health care needs of people of economically weaker section. As a matter of fact, in the subsequent 2-3 years, the Society not only tried to consolidate what it already achieved, but also strived for further expansion of its activities. When I tried to map out a retrospective account of the events, I found there was not a single year when Rural Medicare Society dozed off or went into slumber. Each year was marked with new initiatives, new activities, as if the Society was reborn each year. Administrative and office procedures were smoothed and stream lined; few additional rooms to provide accommodation to hospital staff were built, a library cum conference room for conducting meetings and seminars etc. were added on the first floor of the

building. A deep tube well was bored to solve the problem of water shortage in the hospital. The local people were also benefited from the tube well as they were permitted to use this water during times of water shortage.

New equipments like an incubator, a laparoscope and a new ambulance were further added to our centre. NORAD of Norway and SIMAVI of Holland extended their helping hand with financial assistance to make it possible. Meanwhile the number of patients and operative procedures increased enormously. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, which helped us to stick to our principle and provide low cost, efficient primary and secondary level of health care services to our patients. Despite the over all increase in expenditure and maintenance cost, Society continued to serve the community with the same affordable, nominal charges which was 80% cheaper than any small nursing home or hospital.

To cope up with the rush, Society adopted a rapid turn over system to improve the bed utilization and at the same time cutting down expenditure incurred by the patients.

All these years our primary health centre at village Mandi was functioning well. Free treatment and free vaccination was provided through out. Home visits were organized through our trained paramedic who tried to educate people about the importance of preventive and promotive health care, importance of immunization, antenatal check up, balanced diet, hygiene etc. It helped her (the paramedic) to interact more closely with the community and know their needs. Minor illnesses were treated by her at the extension centre. She referred the problematic cases to our main centre; cooperating with the local "Dais", malaria workers, and Angan Bari workers. This effort gave us the desired result. Awareness increased and so were the number of patients and immunization works. These activities were carried out under the supervision of our consultants who used to visit the centre by rotation. With kind initiative of our well-wisher and friend Halle Hansen, the Norwegian trade union provided us funds to bore two deep tube wells with hand pumps for the distressed stone quarry workers of Mandi. This gave them some respite from the terrible hardship. They got clean drinking water.

As the days passed, Consultants of our centre undertook numerous activities; holding clinical meeting, training paramedics, attending conferences, presenting papers, taking part in the local residents welfare activities, supporting the victims of Bhopal Gas tragedy, organizing melas for stone quarry workers, conducting massive immunization camps simultaneously at various villages and many more. All these stemmed from their sustained commitment.

RMC also marked the occasion by crossing the border. Doctors from RMC started visiting other countries to share their experiences and to learn from others to educate themselves.

RMC welcomed some more new visitors from around the world. A few of the distinguished personalities among them were the wife of the trade minister of Norway; Deputy Minister of health, Kampuchea; Dr. Herman Anker, Per and Maritt Guldin, Halle Hansen from Norway; Peter and Jenny Berman from Ford Foundation; Dr. Mettinger, a Swedish physician; Prof. Stig Bengmark, the world renowned hepato-pancreato-biliary surgeon and the initiator of the world surgical efficiency and management club and Prof. Klass V.D.Veen, our old friend from University of Amsterdam. All of them were impressed with our work as was obvious from the compliments they heaped upon us during most public & official gatherings. While some of them provided us with much needed financial support, the applause from each one of them, their friendship and warmth remained a great stimulus to our work.

Speaking of Prof. Klass, he was a true friend of Rural Medicare Society and instrumental in getting us financial aid from various organizations of Holland. He worked in rural Gujarat to study how social and anthropological issues influence health care. In contrast to other foreigners who quite often consider east as indecipherable enigma, a symbolic world, Klass saw India as a palpable reality in spite of his cultural and linguistic barrier.

Through the years our Society also received a large chunk of foreign students from time to time, who visited and stayed at RMC for a couple of weeks, to study and observe the curative and preventive practices followed in our country. They came from Norway, Denmark, England, Holland, Canada, Germany and many more countries.

Prof S N Mitra our revered president left us for his heavenly abode, all so suddenly, on 28th November '91. His very successful and fruitful tenure of 5 years at RMC abruptly came to an end. He was one of the most dynamic and enthusiastic presidents of the society. A stalwart and a philanthropist, he was not only responsible for re-framing the rules and the regulations of the Society but also for putting the Society back on its tracks at a most difficult time. Hardened workaholic, he gave us very fruitful and able guidance as the live-wire president during the tenure of his office.

Mr. Prabhat Mukherjee, founder secretary of the Society, in spite of his ill health, put his shoulder to the wheel as interim president of the Society. Mr. S.K.Chakravarty, Smt. Monika Chakravarty, Dr. Kalyan

Bagchi, Smt. Anila Bagchi and many more joined our Society. They made us feel that we were not alone in our struggle to achieve our goal. Mr. Chakravarty, as the vice president of the Society, started working hard to raise funds from the very first day of his association with the Society and was considerably successful. He also made an all out effort to procure land for a bigger building with the help of the then Lt. Governor Shri P.K. Dave. We could see a silver lining in the sky. However at this juncture Prof. S.N.Roy, another stalwart of our Society, left us as he had to shift to Kolkata having worked for us for seven long years with utmost honesty and sincerity.

Despite enormously escalated cost of surgical and other hospital items, our charges remained constant. Doctors kept on serving the community with the same zeal. The total number of beds remaining the same, increase in number of patients made the place over crowded. Cleanliness became a problem. Demand for our services increased several folds. Doctors made every effort to evolve rapid turn over system of admitted patients and provide ambulatory services as often as they can. As a part of their academic endeavor they also teamed up to write a book based on their experience titled "Concept and practice of Rural Surgery". The book was edited by Dr. Banerjee and published by B.I.Churill Living stone Pvt. Ltd. As far as I recollect this was the first publication from Rural Medicare Society.

In the mean time the thought of forming a National organization of the surgeons working in rural India was getting crystallized. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Rural Medicare Society was the epicenter for the efforts to make it happen. Consultants of our Society contributed their bit in a big way to form Association of Rural Surgeons of India (ARSI), a forum for the surgeons working in rural and periurban areas of India for the poor masses, with severe resource constraint and often at the cost of sacrificing social life and career prospects both for them and their family. First National conference of this association was held in '93 at Wardha. In the mean time Mr. Prabhat Mukherjee, due to his ill health, handed over the charge of presidentship to Mr. S.K.Chakravarty.

At long last All Mighty blessed us. Our dream came true. With the sincere efforts of our president Mr. S.K.Chakravarty and kind assistance of the then Hon'ble Lt. Governor Shri P.K.Dave we got a piece of land at village Saidul Ajaeb allotted by Delhi administration. A small but significant beginning was made by constructing a small part of our proposed new hospital building for the time being, accommodating the out patient department, O.T. for the day care patients, patients waiting area and a small laboratory.

This had become possible due to the generous contribution of many of our philanthropic friends including Shri P.K.Dave who also sanctioned a grant of Rs. 5 lacs towards this purpose. The society will remain ever grateful to Mr.P.K.Dave for his invaluable whole hearted support and encouragement to its cause.

23rd October 1994 was indeed a Red-letter day in the history of our Society. On this day the new building at village Saidul Ajaeb was inaugurated in a simple but gracefully organized function by Revered mother Pravajika Atma Pranaji, Hony. Secretary, Ramakrishna Sarada Mission and Hon'ble Lt. Governor of Delhi Sri P.K.Dave. This was attended by hundreds of our well wishers. The new hospital also started functioning as a day care centre along with the existing hospital at Mehrauli.

During this period we further received a number of important guests from abroad. Prof. Wilfried Lorenz, professor of operative medicine at university of Marburg, Germany and president of European Society of Medical decision making came with his wife. Sierke Keuning, Managing director of SIMAVI, during his visit to our centre, was moved by the moribund state of our water supply as well as the run down conditions of our building, gracefully donated us a grant of Rs. 1,36,000/- to bore a new well in this rocky area and to repair the building. Dr.Mabelle Arole, advisor to UNICEF and founder of famous comprehensive rural health project, Jamkhed, Maharashtra, made a visit and through an illuminating talk shared her experience of Jamkhed project with us. Also we had Dr. N.H.Antia, an eminent plastic surgeon and president elect of ARSI. He very much appreciated the work of our Society. In the mean time construction of the first phase of the new building was completed.

The year 1995 deserves an exclusive mention as this was the first time our Society got an opportunity to host the National conference of Association of Rural Surgeons of India. The 3rd conference of its kind, this conference acquired a special status due to the presence of two of the regional directors of WHO Dr. Uton M Rafie from the South East Asia region office, New Delhi and Dr. H.A.Gezaury from the Eastern Mediterian region office, Alexandria. This was possible due to the whole hearted efforts made by our present president Dr. Kalyan Bagchi. Shri P K Dave, the then Hon'ble Lt. Governor of Delhi, was the chief guest.

Delegates and eminent speakers from all over the country and a few foreign nations like Nepal, Egypt and Indonesia made this a memorable event through their active participation. Some of the distinguished speakers who shared their learning and experiences with us were Dr. PK Sethi of the Jaipur foot fame, Prof. Balu

Sankaran, President, ARSI, Dr. R.R.Tongaonkar of Dhule, Dr. Anjani Kumar Sharma of Nepal, Dr. Gauripada Dutta of Calcutta, Dr.R.D.Prabhu, secretary of ARSI, and Prof. N.C.Mishra of Lucknow. Live surgical demonstrations were aired to our new hospital through direct CCTV connections; there were scientific deliberations and short paper presentations as well. The engaging mime show by Mr. Alok Roy (of Jagaran) and the Odissi dance recital by Miss S. Sarkar enthralled the delegates.

The new hospital building at village Saidul Ajaeb with its 18 beds, two operation theatres, a laboratory, and x-ray became fully functional by October '95. A canteen and waiting area was created for the patients amidst lush green surroundings. The entire ambience was a palpable contrast from the previous hospital. A little fresh air started flowing into the labyrinths of the building as if freshening the mind, rejuvenating the energy of our consultants. However a small skeleton OPD and laboratory was maintained in the old building premise which was ultimately closed by December '96.

As if to force us to continue our struggle, problems of water and electricity supply persisted. In spite of our hardened effort to solve the problem, it continued like stubborn creepy crawly creatures, primarily because of apathy of respective Govt. authorities. It left us with no other option but to buy high power generator to carry out our daily activities, albeit it escalated the cost of running the hospital. Meanwhile the hospital added some more new equipments like operative microscope, slit lamps, audiometric equipment etc. to the department of ophthalmology and ENT to improve the curative services. A new ambulance was also purchased to provide transport facilities to both indoor and out door patients coming from far off places. In the mean time, construction of second phase of our new building started, to accommodate the research and teaching block, with the help from MEMISA, Holland.

Strong commitment and continued value based services inspired Rural Medicare Society to diversify its activities for the local people. With the genuine efforts of the doctors, the Society became successful in involving and motivating the local community in sanitation, environment and health education programme. The villagers in general, local youths and school teachers in particular, came forward and showed their great interest for various constructive works in the community in collaboration with Rural Medicare Society. Preventive and promotive activities were extended. A youth club was formed with the help of local youths. Many attractive programs to create the interest of local youths were chalked out. The approach road to our new hospital from M. B. Road high way

was widened with the assistance of local residents. An epidemiological study of disease pattern of the patients, attending our hospital, was conducted under DANIDA project by our community health department. A poor patient's fund was created with the help of donation received from a philanthropic organization. Through this fund hundreds of poor patients were benefited till date and received financial help for their treatment. Society remains thankful to Mr. Sunil Dalal for his generous financial help to create this fund.

As the Society's functioning became more systematized, doctors of Rural Medicare Society diversified their action and went one step further to promote the concept of rural surgery nation wide. They came forward with whole hearted support to ARSI to launch a Certificate course in Rural Surgery in collaboration with Indira Gandhi National Open University. To chalk out the curriculum of this course and train the course writers, Society spent Rs.20000/- to sponsor writers workshop. Most of the doctors from RMC involved themselves to write the course material. In the mean time the work load, particularly routine immunization work at Mandi village extension centre became less due to the presence of other NGO's in that area, undertaking similar activities. However other activities continued as before. The centre at Rangpuri village also continued its primary health care program on the same line and spirit as that of Mandi centre. Unfortunately the concept of cleanliness and hygiene did not create much impact amongst the local people of Rangpuri. Lack of basic amenities, rise in poverty due to closure of stone quarries contributed to this. The result was increase incidence of malnutrition, tuberculosis, malaria, skin diseases and gastroenteritis etc. However free treatment was provided to all and a strict vigil was maintained for the families of already affected tuberculosis patients and the contacts were screened.

Teaching program for the paramedical staff and regular clinical meeting of doctors continued at the hospital premises. Many eminent speakers from various institutions of Delhi were invited to speak on various interesting topics.

A new team of governing council and executive body was elected in 1997 under the presidentship of Dr. Kalyan Bagchi. Members of the Society acknowledged and profusely thanked the outgoing president Mr. S.K. Chakravorty and Mrs. Monika Chakravorty for their unstinted support and invaluable contribution for the growth of the Society. Even as a regular member, Dr. Kalyan Bagchi was already working hard for the Society. He contributed enormously to the Society's cause by his bountiful financial help and through his

useful acquaintance with important institutions and personalities.

A host of community oriented activities were further taken up in the subsequent years. Under the guidance of Rural Medicare Society the Youth Club continued to organize sports activities, debate, essay and painting competition for the young boys and girls of the local village. The Society involved children of the local school and the villagers in its various activities and functions like annual day celebration, 50 years of Independence Day of India celebration etc to give them more impetus and channelise their energy for more constructive work. They were encouraged to speak on their concept of '*swaraj and independence*' on the occasion of 50th Independence Day celebration. Prominent speakers were invited at our centre to speak to these young children on various issues, relevant to them. For health awareness of the local villagers a health mela was organized at the school premises. Number of stalls were put up displaying health education materials and other information pertaining to health. Women were educated about their reproductive health and their rights. Hundreds of patients with eye diseases were examined and more than 60 spectacles were distributed free of costs to the villagers through a well organized eye camp by the Society. Simultaneously literary classes were started with the initiative of Mr. Siddiqui and Mr. Rajesh Verma, local school teachers. Mr. Sanjit Roy, our physiotherapist, started Yoga and physical fitness for them. All these activities helped local youths to look at their life in a more positive way and in turn helped us to gain their confidence and develop a relationship.

While other health care activities were carried out as usual, our extension centre at village Mandi which was operating since 1981 was finally closed in 1998. The decision was taken in view of the change of socio economic character of the local community, presence of more number of NGOs and other projects in the locality.

The year 1998-99 could well be marked as the year of academic and research activity. Dept. of hospital administration-AIIMS invited many of our doctors as resource persons for the training program on "Clinical update for doctors of peripheral health institutions." Our consultants addressed attending doctors from different part of India on various topics relevant to their interest. In association with Institute of Social Sciences and Indian Society of Medical Decision Making, a lecture by Prof. David Mulder, Chairman, Department of Surgery, Montreal General Hospital and McGill University, Toronto was organized. Dr. Mulder spoke on "Improving quality of Medical care-recent concepts". Dr. Mulder was on his visit to India to attend

ARSI conference.

A round table discussion on "Ethics, Equity and Health for all in India" was organized by Rural Medicare Society in February '99. Some of the distinguished people who took part in the discussion were president, vice president and secretary of ARSI, Father James Culhas from Catholic Health of Association of India, Mr. Manoj Chatterjee and Ms. Karpagam Iyer, advocates of Supreme Court, Shri Dipankar Gupta, former Attorney General of India and Mr. Arvind Das, noted social scientist. The governing council members of ARSI, journalists from leading news papers, and many others were also present on the occasion. The entire issue and the legalities of it were discussed at length. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Kalyan Bagchi

A medical research and ethics committee was formed involving two eminent lawyers among other members to discuss about the pros and cons and the legal aspect of the proposed trial of 'RISUG', a new drug for reversible male contraception and future research. Scientific clinical meetings, morbidity-mortality meeting, paramedic training program, participation in various conferences continued side by side.

The Society added many more feathers in its cap in the year 1999-2000. Recognition from various quarters started coming in. Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) selected our hospital as one of the centre to carry out the 3rd phase of clinical trial on new drug "RISUG," invented by Prof. Sujay Guha, head of Biomedical Engineering Dept., IIT Delhi.

RMC was also selected as one of the centre in south Delhi for "Reproductive and Child Health Program", launched by IMA in collaboration with WHO. Govt. of Delhi too followed the suit and recognized our centre as an important venue for "pulse polio immunization program".

Annual day celebration used to be a regular event for the Society. But for the first time this was celebrated with great zeal and enthusiasm with active participation of doctors, staff, local people from the community and local school teachers and students. Truly it became a community affair. Painting competition for the local children, music, songs, live demonstration of yoga, dramas depicting important role of house wives in the Society and harmful effect of alcohol on the Society were organized on this occasion. Both the local people and hospital staff equally participated in the program.

Despite the heavy work schedule, doctors of our Society engaged themselves in numerous activities all through their association with the Society. Continued dedication to social service and a keen inclination to academics remained a priority for our consultants. Attending

national and international conferences, paper presentations, organizing clinical meetings, health camps and assisting the NGOs remained a regular feature for many of them. Some have held coveted posts for other organizations, some amongst us visited countries like Norway, England under the exchange program to experience their method of health care delivery system and share our experience with them. Others were actively involved in organizing various health care camps.

Rural Medicare Society deeply mourned the untimely death of one of its finest friends and member Mrs. Priti Mitra who left us for her heavenly abode on 26th February, 2000. She was intimately associated with this organisation and worked with dedication and integrity. A true philanthropist by nature, she not only raised funds in number of occasions for the Society but also worked for the underprivileged and handicapped children of the country all through her life.

In this period Society also received a couple of important visitors to the centre. Dr. Klaus Walters, a young surgeon, Dr. Gabriele Holoch of DTC and Dr. Thomas Moch, a young anesthetist from Germany, Dr. Sheila Kashkari an NRI pathologist from United States, Dr. Sidharth Singhvi, an orthopedic surgeon and former dist. Governor of Rotary International from USA came to our centre. Both Dr. Kashkari and Dr. Singhvi donated a substantial amount to our centre to buy some surgical equipments and a new ambulance. This kind gesture provided us with the much needed impetus to continue with our work.

The year 2001-2002 was marked by a lot of happenings. As if, the beginning of new millennium brought good luck for all of us. It was a year of achievement, an accomplishment of some of our unfinished tasks.

To commemorate the silver jubilee year a new block was added to our existing building complex. It housed the new operation theater, nursery, surgeons' room, chambers for out patient dept., x-ray, laboratory and ultrasound room. These also helped us to add 5 more extra beds for the indoor patients. All these proved to be valuable for patient's comfort and to cope up with the rush of ever increasing number of patients. Automatically the administrative block was also expanded at the basement and got sufficient space to breathe easily.

But the unique addition to this block was a small prayer room based on the faith of *Sarva Dharma Samannaya* where people, irrespective of their cast, creed and religion can come and pray to All Mighty for their well being, read from their scriptures in a peaceful and non-intimidating environment and rejoice. Prayers enhance the prospect of psychological well being as well as

longevity. To my belief, nothing gives human mind so much strength and confidence as prayer based on faith. And who does not know the famous line of Tennyson, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dream of".

Indeed All Mighty listened to our prayer and finally we found the light at the end of the tunnel. We received permanent electricity connection with the help and kind intervention of Hon'ble Chief Minister of Delhi, Ms. Sheila Dixit. This finally ended our long drawn struggle for procuring the necessary electrical power which we were legally entitle to. We express our heart felt gratitude to her. In the mean time in response to our appeal through a project proposal Govt. of Japan agreed to give us a substantial grant to buy modern surgical and gynecological endoscopic equipments, more powerful x-ray machine, auto analyzer, cardiac monitor, ventilator and many more.

It is said "each success only buys an admission ticket to a more difficult problem". Without giving us any water or sewer connection to our centre, refusing to accept our building plan, not even assisting us in widening the approach road which was done with our contribution along with the of local people, the great MCD slapped upon us a very heavy amount of house tax. This was an unjustified decision and unacceptable to us. If we succumb to their unjust demand, we have to raise the charges from our poor patients who have no other access to this kind of health care services.

As a part of silver jubilee celebration, Society organized an oration in memory to our departed member Mrs. Priti Mitra. In a well attended gathering of various luminaries, the oration lecture on "Alzheimer's Disease" was delivered by our president Dr. Kalyan Bagchi. The meeting was presided over by Sri P. K. Dave. This year we also completed the 3rd phase clinical trial of unique reversible male contraceptive drug "RISUG" and thus fulfilled the responsibility, entrusted upon us by ICMR. The "Certificate in Rural Surgery course" was launched in collaboration with IGNOU. For the last few years we have been mulling over the matter of launching this course. So in short prayer proved to be a magic that was silent and invisible.

Saint Tyagataja once said "The nectar of raga (music) affords us the ripe fruits of yaga (penance), yoga (exercise), and bhoga (pleasure)." It reminds me of another facet of Rural Medicare Society's activity. We all know that music nourishes the spirit. Devotional music is an inspirational experience. It releases the heart from early morning lethargy and depression. To my mind, as I have experienced from my early childhood, there is no greater secular binding force than music. With this insight, RMC has an arrangement of playing

audio cassettes of spiritual songs and bhajans in the morning hours. An atmosphere of divinity prevails within the hospital campus. This, I am sure, helps to heal the body, mind and soul. No wonder our patients recover from their illness much faster.

The Society has organized discourses of saints and spiritual people from time to time at our hospital premises. Swami Jitmanandaji of Ramakrishna Mission centre, Rajkot, in his illuminating talk, gave us a strong message of universal brotherhood and love and the concept of serving the God in man. On the occasion of Raksha Bandhan, BrahmKumari Asha Behan from Delhi talked on "Work is worship and Raksha Bandhan". Spiritual people and enlightened souls, every where, always speak the same language; the language of love, gratitude, forgiveness, magnanimity. They inspire you to imbibe these eternal qualities. Asha Behan was no exception. A beautiful feature film based on the life and philosophy of Sant Kabir, "Bal Govind Bhagat" was screened at our centre.

On the occasion of inauguration of our prayer room Swami ChinmayaNandaji from Ramakrishna Mission, Almora came to our centre and gave a stimulating talk on "Life and teaching of Jesus Christ" on 25th December, 2001. Rita Mukherjee, a disciple of Ramakrishna Mission, spoke about the "relevance of celebrating Jesus' birthday" on 25th December, 2002. She had spoken at our centre at several occasions, to the children of nearby village school and hospital staff. She has a unique way to gauge the need of listener and chooses the apt style of her talk which comes alive with a power and life of its own. All these discourses are so soothing that they go deep into the inner recesses of one's being and quietly dissolve like salt in water. And it changes the taste of your life. Indeed, they are the tools of transformation designed to provide flashes of insight.

The past 25 years have witnessed extraordinary social changes. Along with the amazing advancement of global technology there was unprecedented expansion of health care technology. Health became an industry,

investing in illness of the Society. While we refused to accept these changes in its totality, we did not remain mute witness to render ourselves obsolete like a fossilized specimen. We stood by what we believed, to act in accordance with our perception; embarked upon the path of appropriate technology which could be useful to our poor nation and helpful to the community at large, more so to those who are at the margin of the world. Our sustained commitment, attitude, values, indomitable spirit which refused to be junked and above all the exemplary camaraderie of our colleagues helped us to thrive, expand, diversify, and broaden.

It is said that history is the outcome of actions of great men who through sheer force of will are able to shape and bend events to a foreseen and desired end. While the "sheer force of will" remained successful to shape and bend events nearer to our satisfaction, our desired end still lies miles away. And our quest continues Till then let me once again chant my school days prayer from *Katha Upnisad*

ॐ सह नावतु । सह नौभुनक्तु । सह वीर्यं करवावहे ।

तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विशावहे । ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

(Om. May He (the Supreme Spirit of Brahman) protect us both [by illuminating us about the real nature of knowledge]. May He protect us both [by revealing to us the fruits or application of this knowledge]. May we both strive together. May our learning be powerful and illuminative. May there be no disharmony between us. Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

Epilogue

RMC is now well equipped with modern medical and surgical gadgetries like respiratory ventilator, defibrillator, endoscopy equipments, auto analyzer, powerful X-Ray machine etc. procured with the kind assistance of Govt. of Japan. It has enabled the Society to pass on the benefit of some of the advanced medical technology to the community without further raising any-charges. Rural Medicare Society has decided once again to hold 11th National Conference of ARSI in Delhi this year and certainly in a befitting manner.

India is a developing country. In order to make India strong, we must feel that we should become strong. We should not allow ourselves to become subjugated. We must dream and transform our dream into thoughts. Thoughts will result into action. Swami Vivekananda did not simply preach. He was a man of action. India has abundance of natural and human resources. Value addition to this will result in the generation of wealth. It could transform the country and make it a developed nation. You are a mighty force for the nation. Your sweat will transform developing India into a developed nation. Remember the famous saying of a poet 'When I work, God honors me.' Let us work for a developed India.

—A P J Abdul Kalam

PRAYER MEETING



19.08.1938 To 02.02.2019

Dr J K Banerjee, the Founder of Rural Medicare Centre, a Charitable Hospital serving the under privileged section of the community left us for his heavenly abode on 2nd Feb 2019 . He was also the founder member of the Association of Rural Surgeons of India and later on became it's President. He left behind a legacy of compassion and care, technology which is appropriate and applicable to the masses, multilateral thinking and leadership quality, going beyond the routine and normal, influencing policy making and healthcare initiatives.

He leaves behind a grief stricken Rural Medicare family who will endeavour to take his work further and fulfill the goals which he cherished.

Rural Medicare Centre will be holding a prayer meeting in its premises in remembrance of Dr. J. K. Banerjee. You are requested to please join us at this prayer meeting to pay your respects.

Time: 11 : 30 AM

Day : Sunday

Date: 17.02.2019

VENUE

RURAL MEDICARE CENTRE
KHASRA NO -242, VILL - SAIDUALAJAIB,
MEHRAULI, NEW DELHI - 110030.

A handwritten signature or scribble, possibly in blue ink, located to the right of the venue information.