

U. B. Narayan Rao and the origins of the IJDVL

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ABSTRACT

Dr. U. B. Narayan Rao L.C.P.S (Bom) (born 23rd November 1895, died 14th June 1960) had a busy general practice in Bombay. He adopted dermatology and venereology as his specialty in the 1930's and started the Indian Journal of Venereal Diseases in 1935, the first of its kind in the subcontinent. This journal went on to become the official mouthpiece of the Indian Association of Dermatologists and Venereologists in 1955 and was then known as the Indian Journal of Dermatology and Venereology. Dr. Narayan Rao also played an important role as a founder member of the Bombay Association of Dermato-Venereologists as well as the Indian Association of Dermatologists and Venereologists. Activist, indefatigable worker dedicated to the cause, nationalist, and patriot, generous, dynamic and aggressive, with a flare for arguing; negotiating and convincing, and winning friends in the process, were some of the attributes that may be mentioned of this remarkable person who contributed so much to our specialty.

Key Words: History, Publishing, Mouthpiece

INTRODUCTION

Most dermatologists in India today would probably be unaware of Dr. U. B. Narayan Rao, a man whose contribution to dermatology in India is not well recognized, but one, who in fact played a prominent role in the formation of the Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists. He also started his own journal that later became the official mouthpiece of the Association, *i.e.*, the Indian Journal of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology (IJDVL).

Who was this man who passed away into oblivion after a life lived like a meteor that streaks through the sky brightly illuminating the orb, being the centre of attention, but soon fading away from collective memory?

EARLY DAYS

Dr. U. B. Narayan Rao (born 23rd November 1895, died 14th June 1960) was from a well-to-do family based in Sind (now in Pakistan) and passed his L.C.P.S (Bom) diploma in

1919. He joined the Government Medical Service as sub-Assistant Surgeon but quit after a short period of 20 months to seek his fortune in Bombay, where he began thriving in private medical practice. Licentiates in those days were considered to be inferior to graduates and a sort of class system developed in which the graduates scored over the licentiates when it came to government jobs as well as positions in the social hierarchy.*

An activist at heart, Dr. Narayan Rao was infused with the idea of raising the status of licentiates and eventual abolition of the diplomas as the two-tier system of medical education, namely, M.B.B.S and L.M and S were creating a pervasive class system in the medical fraternity.

He joined the All India Licentiates Association and became its General Secretary and subsequently the President, a post that he held till 1944. His love for writing and publishing came to the fore and in 1933, he started a monthly medical magazine called Medical Digest. This magazine was used effectively to address the problems faced by licentiates and

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Dr. Narayan Rao's zeal and hard work went a long way in the eventual abolition of the diploma of L.M and S and the L.C.P.S awarded by the Bombay University and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Bombay, respectively.

By the early 1930s he developed interest in venereology and dermatology and gradually moved from general practice to specialization in dermato-venereology. He was also very active in social work and established an association of his community members. His services were recognized by the British Government, which wanted to confer on him the title of Rao Saheb, but fervent nationalist that he was, he declined to accept it.

THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF VENEREAL DISEASES

In 1935, Dr. Narayan Rao started the Indian Journal of Venereal Diseases by himself. This was the first scientific journal in that subject in the whole subcontinent and was managed entirely by this one person, Dr. U. B. Narayan Rao! Not only was he the Managing Editor, he also single-handedly managed the finances necessary for such an ambitious venture. He managed to involve a large faculty of well-known contemporaries in the field of dermatology and venereology, not only from India, but also from all over the world, who contributed freely to this fledgling journal.

In retrospect, it seems amazing that such a journal was single-handedly started and managed efficiently for so many years. Especially considering that the journal was started in 1935, a full ten years before the first postgraduate diploma (D.V.D) was awarded in the subject by Bombay University and 12 years before a national association of dermato-venereologists was founded in 1947.



1 Dr. UB Narayan Rao (born 23/11/1895, died 14/06/1960)

The Journal was a quarterly and the 1st issue of the journal was published in March 1935. The editorial offices were located at 94/97 Girgaum Road, Bombay 4, and the journal was printed by KP Pilgaonkar of Manvantar Printing Press, 100 D Padhye (Wadekar) Building, Girgaum.

Dr. UB Narayan Rao wrote an editorial titled 'Problems of Venereal diseases in India.'^[1]

Right from the first issue, several foreign contributors sent articles for the journal and the journal found its way to most departments of Dermatology and Venereology all over the world. When visiting several medical institutions in foreign countries, Dr. Narayan Rao was pleasantly surprised to find his journal in the bookshelves of the departments of Dermato-Venereology that he visited.

Dr. Franklin H. Church, MA, MD, the Chief of Clinics at Salem County, New Jersey Social Diseases Clinic, USA, wrote:^[2]
"Congratulations on starting the Journal. The most important section will be that part devoted to research work in antiquity of syphilis in India and the philosophical study of its influence on the people of India over the many thousands of years of Indian civilization".

Dr. Church mildly rebuked his own colleagues for their seeming indifference towards the important subject of medical antiquities. In retrospect, it seems that we change very little with time as the same holds true today in the year 2008!

In order to arouse interest in such subjects, the Journal offered the Charak Memorial prize and gold medal for the best thesis on "the Antiquity of Syphilis (Venereal diseases) in India." The prize was to be Rs. 100 (a large sum of money in those days) with a gold medal, and the manuscripts were to reach the Editor by registered post by 30th December 1935.

The judges for this prize were Lt. Col. KK Chatterjee from Calcutta, Dr. RV Rajam from Madras, and Lt. Col. Jalal M. Shah, Dr. PV Gharpure and Dr. UB Narayan Rao from Bombay.

The prize was awarded to Dr. DV Subba Reddy, MBBS, Medical Registrar, Medical College, Vizag. The entire thesis comprising of more than 50 pages, was published verbatim in the Journal in the following year.

Dr. Subba Reddy went on to write many more articles on the historical aspects of dermatology and venereology, including commentaries on several European physicians at the Mughal court.

A consolation prize of Rs. 25/- was awarded to Dr. HS Joshi, LCPS (Bom) from Nasik.

Later, two more prizes were announced, 1. Manwantar Printing Press prize of Rs. 100 for the best thesis on “Serology in the diagnosis and prognosis of Venereal diseases”, and 2. Prize of Rs. 100 donated by an anonymous admirer of the Journal for the best thesis on “Investigations in Lymphogranuloma Inguinale”.

Dr. Narayan Rao appears to have had very good relations and effective communication with important people all over the world and must have had very good organizing and negotiating abilities. These attributes were highlighted by the then incoming editor of the journal, Dr. TK Mehta in an editorial on Dr. Rao’s demise in 1960.

To illustrate one such association,

In a letter dated December 12th 1935, Prof. Louis Nekam^{**}, Director of Dermatological Clinic in Budapest wrote to Dr. Narayan Rao: “*Would it be possible to get preparations of cases of tropical skin diseases (photographs, microscopic slides, excised material, anatomic preparations, cultures etc) for the teaching collection of our clinic, from colleagues living in your country? In exchange we could send preparations of our interesting cases*”.^[3]

This showed a keen interest and desire from foreign dermatologists of those times to acquaint themselves with Indian and tropical dermatology, an interest that seems to have waned until 25 years later, when the International Society for Tropical Dermatology was formed in 1960.

In the first few years of the Journal, most articles were review articles as well as biographies of famous dermatologists and venereologists of the last (19th) century. Gradually, original articles related to case reports and therapeutics in venereology started appearing in the journal both from Indian as well as foreign contributors. Most Indian articles were from Madras, Calcutta and Bombay—the only three centers in the country at that time to have well-established departments of Dermatology and Venereology.

The Journal underwent two changes in its name, first in 1941 when in its 7th volume, it was renamed as the Indian Journal of Venereal Diseases and Dermatology, undoubtedly reflecting the increasing attention to dermatology and a gradual decrease in the importance of venereology as a specialty.

Later in 1955, from volume 21 onwards, it became the official mouthpiece of the Indian Association of Dermatologists and

Venereologists and was then known as the Indian Journal of Dermatology and Venereology.^{**}

Earlier in 1954, the 20th anniversary of the Indian Journal of Venereal Diseases and Dermatology was celebrated at the Ritz Hotel, Churchgate, Bombay on 30/11/1954 at 5 PM under the Presidentship of Dr. RV Rajam of Madras. Dr. Rajam was the leading venereologist of Madras and the seniormost member of the specialty all over India. Dr. Shantilal H. Shah, Minister for Labour and Public Health, Government of Bombay inaugurated the function. Dr. Narayan Rao as the managing editor, welcomed the guests in his inimitable style. In the 20 years from 1935 to 1954, 79 issues were published with a total of about 3500 pages. The Editorial Board had eight foreign and 39 Indian members. International specialists contributed 161 articles vs 179 Indian contributions.

FORMATION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF DERMATOLOGISTS AND VENEREOLOGISTS

Dr. Narayan Rao was an active participant in the day-to-day interactions amongst most dermato-venereologists in Bombay and thus, gets the credit for the creation of an association of dermatologists and venereologists of Bombay, which was inaugurated on July 1, 1947. He was the Honorary Secretary of that association for 1950 and the President for 1958. The Bombay Association organized an All-India Conference of Dermatologists and Venereologists on December 27th and 28th, 1947, at J. J. Hospital, Bombay.^[4]

Dr. Narayan Rao also played a major role in the formation of the Indian Association of Dermato-Venereologists by becoming the General Secretary. On this occasion, Dr. Narayan Rao magnanimously offered his journal that he had started in 1935 to the Association as the official mouthpiece of the association.

The 2nd National Conference was held in Calcutta in 1951 and among the resolutions passed, was one that the three existing branches of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta were to be integrated into the Indian Association of Dermatologists and Venereologists. It was also decided to make the Indian Journal of Venereal Diseases and Dermatology the official organ of the National Association, however, it was not until 1955 that this event actually took place.

In 1955, the following Editorial by Dr. Narayan Rao appeared on 31st March 1955:^[5]

I HAND OVER: I TAKE OVER

“With this issue the journal is to change hands. It was being run as a proprietary concern for two decades and with the formation of Indian association of Dermatologists and Venereologists the journal will be in future the official mouthpiece of the association. In future the Journal will be known as the Indian Journal of Dermatology and Venereology”.

Dr. RV Rajam from Madras and Dr. G Panja from Calcutta were to be Editors-in-Chief for venereology and dermatology, respectively, a 3rd Editor-in-Chief for leprosy was proposed and Dr. UB Narayan Rao would continue as Managing Editor.

Editorial Collaborators were from:

Bombay: JA Fernandez, WN Welinkar, SC Desai

Madras: P Natesan, PN Rangiah

Calcutta: BN Banerjee, Major S. Ghosh

TAKING INDIA TO THE WORLD

Apart from managing the journal, giving of his time to the Association, both in Bombay and at the National level, and his private practice, that by now was restricted to dermato-venereology, Dr. Narayan Rao was a regular attendee at international dermatology and venereology events, where he developed his contacts and furthered his friendships with the international community of dermato-venereologists.

The 10th International Congress of Dermatology and Syphilology was to be held in 1940 in the USA. A letter from Dr. Paul A. O’Leary, Executive secretary from the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota, USA was written to Dr. UB Narayan Rao, appointing him as Permanent Secretary for the Congress from India. The conference however was postponed due to the war that was going on in Europe and was held only in 1952 in London. Dr. Narayan Rao later attended both the 1952 International Congress of Dermatology in London and the subsequent 11th International Congress held in Stockholm in 1957.

LAST DAYS

In May 1958, Dr. UB Narayan Rao then aged 63, expressed a desire to be relieved of the responsibilities as Managing Editor of the journal but was asked to continue until someone

could take over. He continued to do so wholeheartedly for two more years when he suddenly passed away after a short illness of seven days. He had suffered from fibrosarcoma but was quite active till the very end.

A quote from an obituary written by Dr. Sharat C. Desai that appeared in the Journal in 1960:

“Like the old saying, ‘old soldiers never die, they just fade away,’ he met death with equanimity and with the thoughts of the Association on his mind. The annual general meeting of the Bombay branch association in May 1960 was the last duty he was to perform for the organization that he loved so much and nurtured like his own child. In the process, he submerged his personal interests and never spared any effort, time or money for the cause. Indeed, it was a personal sacrifice that he magnanimously handed over his journal over to the All India Association as its mouthpiece. He played the role of a genial host at many meetings held for the association. Visiting dermato-venereologists received unsolicited honour and respect from him spontaneously in an effort to win friends for the cause. His qualities of heart usually won over the conflicts of head. This was amply borne out when he made uncompromised efforts to win back friends amongst some of his colleagues, when unfortunate controversies developed regarding the management of the association and who misunderstood his failings which were those of omission and not of commission.

In his love for the organizational aspects of his (adopted) specialty he sacrificed his lucrative practice and it may well be said that an active lifetime of devotion to the callings which he understood as his cherished goal was truly fulfilled.”

Dr. UB Narayan Rao died on 14. 06. 1960.

A condolence meeting was held in Bombay to mourn his death on 22.06.1960.

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