

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

In the life of a man, may come a day, when in all humility he could own to his colleagues that they have done him an honour he was perhaps not worthy of. Such a day did, fortunately, dawn in my life in January 1981 when you installed me as your president for 1981-82. Whether I lived up to your expectations or not is for you to judge. For this singular honour you did me, I would use these two priceless words in English and say 'Thank You'.

I would prefer not to recount the achievements, if any, of the last year but dwell a little on the past, present and the future of our specialties in this country.

It is perhaps unnecessary to point out that the undergraduate and post-graduate dermatological education in this country has vastly improved, numerically and qualitatively. And the credit for this goes chiefly to pioneers such as Banerjee, Desai, Dharmendra, Khandari, Khanolkar, Rajam, Rangiah and Thambiah. Between them they have trained a whole lot of teachers who today man various medical schools in this country and abroad. It is no mere coincidence then that for the 4th year in succession, each of the presidents of this Association has been trained by a single individual—Professor Kandhari: to him and to others we wish to pay a special tribute. To add a personal note, I feel deeply honoured that the two persons responsible for my initiation and continuance in the speciality should have been here. I refer to Prof. Kandhari and Prof. Magnus. To these friends, philosophers and guides I should like to pay my special tribute in the traditional Indian style.

Over the past decade or so an important change has taken place in the Psyche of the specialists themselves. I could sum this up by saying that 'we are no longer apologetic' of being called Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists. We no longer seem to think this is the speciality of the downtrodden, for the downtrodden by the downtrodden. This is a remarkable revolution, the magnitude of which only those of us who lived through this transition period can best appreciate. The days when a skin patient was regarded as a patient for ever are long since gone; the days when students will ignore the study of dermatology for some of the so-called major-disciplines no longer exist. Dermatology has changed the quality of life even though it may not have significantly contributed to a decrease in the mortality. The specialties, in a manner of speaking, seem to have arrived and we can walk with our heads high as much as specialists in other fields.

It is also a measure of the training being offered, in this country that residents from the developed and developing world alike are coming to work in India. Students from Japan, the USA, the UK, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Mauritius, Thailand and other parts have been trained for their formal postgraduate degrees or simply informal elective residency. The faculty from this country is being invited for regular or visiting assignments in many parts of the world. Kipling was obviously mistaken; perhaps he was not aware of the existence of dermato-venereologists; the twain East and West have not only met, they have intermingled. And the evidence is here in this very hall.

And what of the future. The challenges and opportunities in these specialties are tremendous. We have to seek information as well as wisdom for in imagining that we have sought all, we would but be fools. We have to strive for better and for better and there shall be no respite till we can say we are second to none. Leprosy, sexually transmitted diseases apart from common infective dermatoses are still very much with us and should form

the first line of attack. To the cynics, I might seem a dreamer, but the pity is some people do not dream at all. The year of the disabled has just ended and I assume that included prevention of disability too. Should we not decide a year to Leprosy and a year to Sexually Transmitted Diseases; should we not aim for what might seem like a Utopian goal - Leprosy Zero; V.D. Zero!

L. K. Bhutani

Delivered on the occasion of the Xth annual conference of the IADVL by the outgoing President.