

PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY OF INDIA: THE OLDEST INDIAN PHARMACEUTICAL ORGANISATION

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The Madras Medical College started a pharmacy class in 1860. Following the then prevailing practice in Britain, the college instituted chemists' and druggists' class in 1870s. The qualified chemists and druggists organised themselves into the Pharmaceutical Association in 1923, changing the name to the Pharmaceutical Society of India in 1925. The Society looked up to the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain as the model. However, unlike the Society in Britain which had statutory powers, and the membership of which got to be compulsory for pharmacists, its counterpart in India remained a voluntary organisation. The prominent builders of the Pharmaceutical Society of India were Wilfred Pereira and A. N. Lazarus. The Society spearheaded the movement for improvement of the quality of pharmacy practice in the country and worked for the promotion of the cause of pharmacy. The Society brought about the pharmaceutical awakening and continued to function for quarter of a century. In 1949 it merged into Madras Branch of the Indian Pharmaceutical Association. The unique society in India of qualified practising pharmacists passed into history.

Key Words: Chemists and druggists, Indian Pharmaceutical Association, A. N. Lazarus, Madras Medical College, M.P.S. (India), Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, Pharmaceutical Society of India, S. Rajagopal Naidu, Wilfred Pereira.

INTRODUCTION

In 1860 a pharmacy class was started at the Medical College, Madras.¹ The class provided for pharmaceutical instruction for the students qualifying for medical degrees or diploma, apothecary grade, or hospital assistantship. Later, the class proved useful for the students intending to qualify as chemists and druggists. In 1870s a class for chemists and druggists were also instituted at the College. Broadly it was a following of the practice as it prevailed at the time in Britain. This diploma class became the only pharmaceutical instruction course of its type for pharmacy practice in the British India. In the third decade of the twentieth century the chemists and druggists in Madras got organised professionally into the Pharmaceutical Society of India. They looked up to the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain as the model.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, formed in 1841, was officially recognised in 1843 through a Royal Charter.^{2,3} The Pharmacy Act followed in 1852. The Society's Council was authorised to set up a register of chemists and druggists, of associates and students, and to examine persons for registration. The Pharmacy Act, 1868 made pharmaceutical examinations compulsory. The personal descriptions, viz. pharmaceutical chemist, pharmacist, and pharmacist came into common use and these received legal recognition through the Poisons and Pharmacy Act, 1908. The Pharmacy and Poisons Act, 1933 made membership of the society compulsory for pharmacists. Till then the membership had been voluntary.

PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY OF INDIA

In India, to regulate and to bring some order in the state of pharmacy practice, a chemist by the name J. T. Bilney, working with a firm in India, proposed the establishment of a pharmaceutical society, one of the rules of which should be that no medicine would be dispensed or poison sold by other than legally qualified men, who should have been examined by a board appointed by the Government.⁴ Need was expressed for a society and an examining board, much on the same lines as the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and recognised

by, but not dependent on the Government.⁵ This could protect the public from poisoning by unqualified dispensers.⁶ It was visualised that there was a great future for a society of the kind.^{7,8} Establishment of an Indian pharmaceutical society with centres at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras was mooted.⁹

In 1913, a favourable progress was reported for developing cohesion among European chemists through an Indian pharmaceutical society.¹⁰ Such a society did get formed under the name of Pharmaceutical Society of India with W. T. Grice as the president.¹¹ But it did not last long.¹² However, the credit for first formalisation of the title Pharmaceutical Society of India goes to this short-lived organisation.

A reference may also be made to a related effort by the sub-assistant surgeons, earlier carrying the appellation of hospital assistants. The All India Sub-Assistant Surgeons Association opened a Pharmaceutical Section at their conference held at Madras in December 1916.^{13,14} It was intended that the section would do ground work for the "Pharmaceutical Society for India," representative of all classes of qualified medical men, qualified pharmacists, and scientists.¹³⁻¹⁵ It was envisaged that the society would promote the interest of Indian drugs and give an impetus to the knowledge and practice of pharmaceutical chemistry in general. The objectives were somewhat diffuse. No further information is available about the intended conversion of the Section to the society.

The above survey is mostly for the purpose of record. Later, there did take place formation of a Pharmaceutical Society of India, at Madras, which was constituted of professionally qualified personnel. The Society continued to function for around quarter of a century.¹⁶

The Society was started in the year 1923 under the name of "The Pharmaceutical Association"; at places the name of this association has been erroneously referred to as "the Indian Pharmaceutical Association."^{17,18} In 1925, the name was changed into "The Pharmaceutical Society of India". The prominent architects and builders of this Society were Wilfred Pereira, of the Wilfred Pereira Ltd, and A. N. Lazarus, of Messrs Spencer & Co. Ltd.

The foremost aim of the Society was to have a federation of qualified pharmacists in India with a view to establish a uniform system of education for quali-

fication as pharmacists and have a compulsory registration of pharmacists and control over pharmacies in India. Establishment of a library of its own was also envisaged. It was endeavoured to raise the standard of pharmacy and promote the interests of pharmaceutical chemists.¹⁹

The Society enrolled chemists and druggists qualified from the Madras Medical College. The working committee consisted of a president, three vice-presidents, a consulting pharmacologist from the medical profession, and five members.²² Names of Lt-Col. C. A. F. Hingston, I.M.S.,^{17,18} Major Clive Newcomb, M.D., F.I.C.,¹⁹ and Major-General J. W. D. Megaw, I.M.S.,²⁰ figure as the presiding officers of meetings, including special lectures. The Society had the privilege of hosting lectures by Sir P. C. Ray,^{17,18} Lt-Col. A. H. J. Gidney, I.M.S. (ret), M.L.A.,²⁷ and Professor J. C. David.²⁸ A. N. Lazarus continued as Hon. Secretary of the Society.

In an article on pharmacy in India, it was observed that the Pharmaceutical Society of India comprised of mere forty members.²⁹ But for Madras Medical College, no other medical college in India offered diploma of the standard as conducted at Madras. The standard of membership of the Society was sufficiently high to ensure efficient service, and the qualifications required for entry to it were "approximately on a par with those of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain." These complimentary expressions were followed by a very forthright statement, "There are millions of people in this country suffering from curable complaints. There are thousands of doctors to prescribe for them. There are forty or so pharmacists qualified to carry out the prescriptions. Forty! The position of pharmacy in India is truly a farce." That was the statement made by a Britisher located at Madras.

The Society continued to promote the cause of pharmacy. A memorandum was presented for consideration of the Drugs Enquiry Committee, emphasising the need of a Poisons and Pharmacy Act, restriction of dispensing to qualified chemists, and raising the standard of examination of the compounders to make them more useful to the pharmaceutical profession.²² In an editorial the London-based *Pharmaceutical Journal and Pharmacist* viewed the Pharmaceutical Society of India to be "a small but very active and earnest body" and referred to

the memorandum it submitted to the Drugs Enquiry Committee.³⁰ The editorial commented on the sad state of pharmacy in India and meaningfully stated, "Chemists in this country, already in possession of some of the elementary rights for the attainment of which the Pharmaceutical Society of India is seeking, will sincerely wish them success in their efforts to put an end to the outrageous anomalies and scandals by which, under existing anarchistic conditions, so much of the drug trade in India is disgraced."

The Pharmaceutical Society of India by now gained in status, but remained a voluntary organisation. In the governmental records the Society was described as "a respectable and well qualified body of chemists and druggists."³¹ The Government noted to consult the Society on matters affecting chemists and druggists.^{31,32} The proposal for appointing a member of the Society to the Board of Examiners for the chemists and druggists and use of title M.P.S. (India) by the diploma holders possibly did not make headway.³¹ Further official records have not become available, but later documents show that members of the Society were appending with their names the qualification "M.P.S. (India)." This is evident from letterhead of the communication addressed by the Society president on 14 November 1938 to the Government of Madras, which I was able to see in original at the Tamil Nadu Archives.³³ It may be mentioned that in the communication Dr. S. Rajagopal Naidu, M.B.E., and Rao Bahadur Dr A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar were listed as the president and vice-president respectively. The other vice-president Wilfred Pereira, secretary and registrar A. N. Lazarus and assistant secretary and treasurer H. J. Broughten carried M.P.S. (India) as their professional qualifications. In the document the Society had recommended change of the term "compounder" to "pharmacist" and the term "chemist and druggist" to "pharmaceutical chemist"; the issue was not followed in view of the contemplated pharmacy legislation.

The Society decided to expand and better project its activities through its own journal. The first number of the quarterly journal designated as *The Pharmacist* was published in July 1939, with K. Venkatapathi Naidu as the editor.^{34,35} A regular publication of the Journal dwindled.³⁶ Possibly the publication could not be sustained for long. No issue of the journal has become available for scrutiny.

The constitution of the Society and the byelaws are not traceable. The only document of the Society on hand is the Minutes Book covering the 1938-49 period.²⁴ There is no hope of redeeming the previous papers and the minutes. Dr. S. Rajagopal Naidu was the president in 1938; as to when he was elected is not certain. He continued to hold the office till his demise in January 1947. He was followed by Dr. J. C. David as the president, who was professor of pharmacology at the Madras Medical College. Wilfred Pereira and A. N. Lazarus continued as vice-president and secretary respectively althrough. It is noted that Lt-Col. Newcomb, I.M.S., was the first president.³⁷ Lt-Col. C. A. H. Hingston, Sir A. L. Mudaliar, Dr. P. V. Cherian, and K. Venkatapathi Naidu, were also among the vice-presidents at certain stages. P. V. Rama Rao remained the assistant secretary from 1944 onwards. It comes out that passed compounders were accepted as associate members but they were not allowed to use the acronym M.P.S (I) against their names. In 1949, the Society had a membership of 56.

The Society planned holding of All India Pharmaceutical Conference and Exhibition at Madras in January 1940.^{35,38,39} There is no record of the conference having been held.

DISSOLUTION OF THE SOCIETY

No doubt the Pharmaceutical Society of India was the oldest organisation of its type. The Society kept its active membership open only to qualified chemists and druggists/diplomates of pharmacy. As such its area of operation remained the Madras Presidency only since nowhere else qualified pharmacists were being trained in colonial India.

During the contemporary period there emerged other pharmaceutical associations and the view started crystallizing in favour of assemblage into one national pharmaceutical fraternity. Dr. B. Mukerji, President, Bengal Pharmaceutical Association, approached the Society with a proposal for its amalgamation with theirs. The Society decided against merger with any other pharmaceutical organisation.⁴⁰ From within the ranks there came up a suggestion that for building a comfortable financial base there could be merger of the Society with the

Madras Chemists and Druggists Association; but joining hands with a commercial body got to be disfavoured.⁴¹

A proposal received from the Indian Pharmaceutical Association, Banaras, after an initial indifference, started receiving a careful consideration. The negotiations which started in 1946,⁴² after prolonged deliberations, including through a visit to Bombay by A.N. Lazarus for the purpose, culminated in amalgamation of the Society with the IPA Madras Branch.^{37,43}

The Government of Madras was duly informed about dissolution of the Pharmaceutical Society of India.²³ The dissolution became effective from 21 May 1949. A unique society in India of qualified practising pharmacists passed into history.

A striking feature of the working of the Pharmaceutical Society of India was that several of the high dignitaries of the time, who were not pharmacists themselves, lent their direct support to the Society in promoting the cause of pharmacy. They were acceptable to the practising pharmacists for the offices of president/vice-president of the Society. Such prominent persons included members of the Indian Medical Service, and luminaries like Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, who became Vice-Chancellor of the Madras University, and Dr P. V. Cherian, who on retirement as Surgeon General with the Government of Madras occupied the position of Governor of Bombay.

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