

The story of a still-born 'medical college'

Satya Pal Dang

During the March 1996 budget session of the Punjab Assembly, in response to Question no. 556, the Chief Minister (C.M.) in a written answer told Mrs. Vimla Dang, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA): 'The Principal of Medical College, Jalandhar who had been appointed w.e.f. (with effect from) 23-9-94, is being paid Rs.8000/- as pay and Rs.1000/- as non-practicing allowance P.M (per month). According to the government rules he is drawing D.A (dearness allowance) as well. He is paid other allowances at par with the Director of P.G.I. (Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research) Chandigarh. Up to 31-1-96 the Principal has been paid a total amount of Rs.2,54,444/.'

In response to the same question, the C.M. had also admitted that till then not a single student had been admitted in the college under reference.

The full story

The government headed by Sardar Beant Singh took over in February 1992. After a short while he announced a new medical college at Jalandhar. Many were astonished at that. The first reason was that the Medical Council of India would not accord its sanction to another medical college in Punjab according to the rules laid down by it. The second reason was that if at all a new college was to be opened, it should be either at Bhatinda or Sangrur where it was really needed.

At present Punjab has five medical colleges. Three of these are located at Amritsar, Patiala and Faridkot. All three are run by the Government of Punjab. There are two other non-government colleges situated at Ludhiana (Daya Nand Medical College and the Christian Medical College). From Ludhiana, Jalandhar is hardly an hour's run and Amritsar, two hours away.

In spite of all that, none opposed the decision of the government to open a new college at Jalandhar. Instead many appreciated the decision. Even then a question arose. It was whether the new college would be run by the government or the private sector. The government went on changing its position. At last it came to light that the college would be a semi-government institution. Its managing committee would consist of some politicians, senior officers and perhaps some other influential persons.

Where exactly would this college be located at Jalandhar? The answer was that the Punjab Agriculture

University would be asked to shift its Cane Research Farm to some other district and its entire land would be handed over to the new medical college. The people of the surrounding area objected to it on the ground that it would not be a proper place for the purpose.

The Deputy Commissioner of Jalandhar suggested two other sites for the purpose. The government stubbornly stuck to its position. Why?

Investigation showed that the college was meant for wards of non-resident Indians abroad and such wards of the officers and politicians as otherwise would not be able to get admission on merit but would be in a position to pay huge amounts as tuition fees. The Supreme court, in one of its decisions, allowed half the seats to be filled through huge capitation fees. It was decided to start a new non-government medical college at Jalandhar because it is from this district and its nearby areas that the maximum number of Punjabis have gone to foreign countries.

Perhaps it is only 'proper' to look after the interest of these people along with those of officers and the wards of ministers, especially those who are not good at their studies. But why at the cost of the Cane Research Farm?

Researchers at the Cane Farm were of the opinion that the closure of the cane farm would cause irreparable loss to the Punjab agriculture because it would take several years to set up a new farm at other place. They also said that the farm owned much more land than required for proposed medical college. Why did the government want to take over the entire land?

It later came to light that a large portion of the acquired land would be sold as residential and commercial plots which would fetch huge amounts. These funds would be used for the construction of the college. It is also been possible that some key players might have incidentally enriched themselves simultaneously.

Additional puzzles

Why did the then Vice-Chancellor of the Agriculture University, Ludhiana not speak out against this injustice. Sources in the University state that he is indebted to the government for its benevolence towards him. As his continuance was the result of the government's mercy, silence seemed to be the best course.

The government wanted the college to be constructed in full view of the public. Hence some money was

invested from government's exchequer. On 29.3.95, in response to question no. 2269, the government told Mrs. Vimla Dang that the government had already released three crore rupees for the Medical College, Jalandhar.

But there was no budgetary provision for this amount. Where did the money come from? No research was needed here. The Guru Nanak Dev Hospital, Amritsar presently does not have any proper Emergency Ward of its own. As there was a long standing demand for this ward and for a super-speciality ward, budgetary provisions were made for them. Construction of these wards started on 15-3-1993 but was stopped mid-way. Before the construction was suspended, an amount of one crore and seventy two lac rupees had already been spent. The remaining amount was diverted to the Jalandhar Medical College.

The construction at Amritsar is in the process of decay. A sum of one crore and seventy five lac rupees is going down the drain.

In response to Question No. 2984 by Vimla Dang, the Chief Minister replied in March, 1996, 'The work at Amritsar can be completed within 20 months provided funds are available.'

Kulwant Singh is an ex-MLA of the Communist Party of India. He is a farmer and is a prominent leader of the Punjab Kisan Sabha. He had filed a writ in Punjab and Haryana High Court on behalf of the cane-growers against the liquidation of the cane-research farm. The High Court pronounced that the land in excess of what was needed for the college should not be taken over.

It appears that after this judgement, the whole scheme of the college has been abandoned. How then was the Principal appointed without any admission of students? What is the Principal of the 'college' doing ?

(Modified slightly from the translated version by Professor Pritam Singh Parwana of the original published in Urdu in Hind Samachar group of newspapers.)

Why do doctors so often make mistakes? Because they are not sufficiently individual in their diagnoses or their treatment. They class a sick man under some given department of their nosology, whereas every invalid is really a special case, an unique example. How is it possible that so coarse a method of sifting should produce judicious therapeutics? Every illness is a factor simple or complex, which is multiplied by a second factor, invariably complex - the individual, that is to say, who is suffering from it, so that the result is a special problem, demanding a special solution, the more so the greater the remoteness of the patient from childhood or -from country life.

The principal grievance which I have against the doctors is that they neglect the real problem, which is to seize the unity of the individual who claims their care. Their methods of investigation are much too elementary; a doctor who does not read you to the bottom is ignorant of essentials. To me the ideal doctor would be the man endowed with profound knowledge of life and the soul, intuitively divining any suffering or disorder of whatever kind and restoring peace by his mere presence. Such a doctor is possible, but the greater number of them lack the higher and inner life, they know nothing of the transcendent laboratories of nature; they seem to me superficial, profane, strangers to divine things, destitute of intuition and sympathy. The model doctor should be at once a genius, a saint, a man of God.

(The Journal Intime of Henri-Frederic Amiel, Scheveningen, August 22, 1873.)