

# Of Student's Health

## Probhat Kumar Roychowdhury

[এই লেখাটি ১৯৫৬ সালে শ্রীপ্রভাত রায়চৌধুরী যখন কলকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের ছাত্র ছিলেন সেই সময় কলকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় থেকে প্রকাশিত “একতা” পত্রিকা থেকে নেওয়া হয়েছে। আমরা পুনর্মুদ্রন করলাম।]

The past glories of India, one of the cradles of ancient human civilisation are familiar to us. Today in the middle of the twentieth century, the reality of our country strikes a note of contrast. Behind the beautiful landscapes, chirps of birds and abundant natural resources, lie traces of ugliness, human miseries that form legacies, of the past. Foreigners, very often bewildered by the glaring contrasts locationally described India as a rich country inhabited by a poor people. But the reason is not far to seek; even a school boy of our country will point his finger to the years of darkness foisted on us by an alien rule.

15th August 1947 heralded the dawn of freedom, the rest of the world expected a sharp turn towards progress in the wheel of history. Now we take pride in saying that the expectations of our friends have not been belied—India has become a mighty force in favour of world peace that everyone has to reckon with. We are racing with time to catch up with the advanced nations of the world and we are determined to build life anew, to stamp out the evils of the past. We know there exists crushing poverty but we shall create wealth for everyone to live in happiness. We know that we are stuck up on the swamp of economic backwardness, but we shall make new factories raise their heads in every corner of our country. We know that the dark veil of illiteracy covers thousands of Indian villages, but we shall tear it to shreds. We know that our country has long been a happy haunting ground for premature deaths and diseases, but armed with science we shall cry a halt to these enemies. Whatever the price we have to pay, we must unfold the luxuriant beauty of our motherland in its full grandeur.

Students of India look back with pride to their heroic participation in the battle for national independence. And today in this festival of creation of a newly awakened India they cannot allow themselves to be mere spectators. With knowledge, with courage and in identity with the interests of the people, Indian students are living up to play a very useful role in society. They are joining efforts to achieve a system of democratic and scientific education and to remove the obstacles that set limits to the horizon of academic life. They look forward to a brighter tomorrow with a sense of optimism.

But in what condition do our students live and work to-day ?

Inspite of our optimistic attitude towards our future, we must take serious note of the vital problems of to-day.

Let us have a glimpse of the survey report initiated by Dr. Jnan Ghosh, the ex-Vice Chancellor of our University, of the condition of work and study and nutrition of the students.



According to their observation 81% of the students come from families with per capita expense of Rs. 50/- and less per month. This per capita income is too low to maintain a person with sound health and mind. Evidently these families who do not have sufficient income to meet all the needs for adequate living conditions, do send their boys and girls stinting themselves of the necessities. The economic condition as revealed would explain the need of students for supplementing their resources by part-time or full-time jobs. But the opportunities for such work are limited in the extreme. Even 15% of the students work full time jobs, i.e. one in every seven has to earn in order to learn. Students in general do not have sufficient food to supply them energy which formative years of life demands.

The Health problem among the students of our country is a stumbling block that we must face. Like menacing worms—premature deaths, diseases and malnutrition threaten the flowering youth of our country. According to Dr. Jnan Ghosh's report—"out of every twenty students examined, nine students are undernourished and poorly developed ; i.e. 42% are undernourished and another 34% are moderately nourished." The survey of the diabetic habits showed that for 84% of the students, the standard of diet has deteriorated considerably compared to the standard reached in 1938—peak year before the 2nd World war. The quantities of fish and milk are too low to meet the daily requirements of the body and butter has completely disappeared from these diet! No wonder that 86% of our undergraduates living in Calcutta require some immediate medical aid and attention, and according to the findings of a health survey conducted by Students Health Home, 85 out of 100 sick students require diagnosis and treatment, whereas the remaining 15% need hospitalisation. 59.9% were found with low vital capacity. Cases of ear, nose and throat diseases are as high as 65.4%, whereas one third of the students suffer from eye troubles. In the month of August 1956, West Bengal's health minister disclosed some alarming figures regarding the incidence of illness among the school students. According to him the incidence of illness among the school children of Burdwan district is 45%, Malda district 35% and Darjeeling 40%—where the cases of tubercular infection are 32%. Added to these are the ravages of infectious diseases like small pox, Cholera, Typhoid, Measles etc. And Tuberculosis has thrown the formidable challenge as it is taking away one life from—among us in every minute.

In the overcrowded city of Calcutta exact population which is always open to doubt, college students number about 60,000. Student population of the three universities of West Bengal (Calcutta University, Jadavpur University and Visva Bharati) taken together is somewhat near 85,000. These figures drive us to a conclusion that the health problem which is most acute in this part of India is also of the biggest magnitude.

The concept that every individual should be regarded in his or her social group and that when considering the question of health, this new development should be taken note of, is becoming increasingly popular. More and more emphasis is laid on a positive conception of health, expressing the new trend of social medicine. "Medicine is coming of age as a social science in the service of society." By social medicine is understood that the care of health is based not only on the fight against sickness, but



more and more on the judicious preservation of disease; indeed preventive medicine is growing proportionally more important than the curative medicine. Among the methods of prevention, medical examination for the detection and control of disease, carried out frequently, and as often as necessary in individual cases, form one of the best means not only from the practical but also from the financial point of view of controlling, protecting and restoring health.

In this context of increasing awareness of safeguarding and improving health a student should be allowed the facilities of an organised health service, to benefit from them at a time when he is faced with physical and intellectual fatigue, is becoming more intimately acquainted with society, is often deprived of his family, home and of all that the later means to him in the way of affection, solicitude and care and is launching out in life, needing advice more than in any other period of his life, concerning his health and protection, in order to safeguard and develop fully his physical well-being. The carrying into effect of organised health project for the students community is of vital importance to-day.

But what arrangements has our society provided for us in this direction ? Do we have a proper health service to cater for the needs of the students ? This is what the university education commission appointed by the Government of India commented—".....most Universities and colleges, visited by the commission, claimed to have some kind of physical check-ups with preventive and curative measures but it is fun to say that these programmes with a few exception exist largely on paper and the authorities frankly admit that the administration is fiction.....".

Under these circumstances, when suffering students in thousands are crying for help to which our Universities and Government are yet to come, the students cannot sleep idly indifferent to this vital question of our national life. The noble idea of self-help movement developed quickly in the minds of the students community. They realised that they could unite themselves on the common cause of serving the health needs of their brethren and with their own efforts they could share a considerable part of this national responsibility. The development of organisation of, students' health service in different countries is interesting. In almost all countries of the world to-day specialised student-health service has come into vogue. We, too, are trying to keep pace with them.

The students of our country came forward to serve their own health needs. They approached the problem from a position that appeared as the most unexpected angle. They combined themselves into an institution known as the Students Health Home, as an association of all students to help the sick and in co-operation with medical men, educationists and other communities initiated measures to build up a unique student health project in our country. New grounds were prepared in the field of student activities and Students Health Home was very soon greeted with approving applause from every quarter. By uniting the students on the principle of self-help and co-operation, Students Health Home, Calcutta, has blazed a new trail for the students community to travel. Through activities aimed at rendering medical aid and assistance to the ailing students, Student community has impressed on the public mind how



inseparable bound up are the causes of national progress and students welfare.

It is something new that 100 eminent consultants and physicians of Calcutta, specialists in the different branches of medicine have joined the panel of doctors of Students Health Home to give free services to the student patients. It is something unique that in this students' Health project are represented all the three Universities of West Bengal and the Corporation of Calcutta. It is something reassuring that the authorities of the Universities, the Jadavpur University and some other colleges of Calcutta have introduced universal membership of the Home for the students belonging to those institutions. Our students' Union has also adopted an unanimous resolution to this effect. We hope, that our authorities, will also ratify the same at an early date.

The Students' Health Home has not only grown into an effective and novel health project, it is also a blessing to the creative and constructive abilities of the youth, the student community in particular. At present the Students Health Home has been able to bring diagnosis and treatment within the reach of students. Diagnosis is offered free, costly medicines are supplied only at a token donation. Students are given opportunities to have spectacles, X-Ray and laboratory examinations at the cheapest available price.

But the Health Home, from the point of intensity as well as the extent of the Students Health problems, shall have to increase the efforts hundredfold. Needs of those who are counting minutes in their sick-bed are so compelling that we must immediately provide more money, medicines, medical equipments, free bed in hospital and sanatorium, and trained personnel.

Many student patients have already been treated, but countless others still await treatment. We must go to their rescue we must defend their education, ambition and valuable lives.

Future programme of Students Health Home envisages establishment of Students' Hospital in Calcutta, exclusively for students. It is a stupendous task but the students shall have to achieve it.

The patient who is convalescing in the I.U.S. Sanatorium in Peking is perhaps choked with emotion when he measures the value of allotment of free beds in that Sanatorium for Indian students suffering from Tuberculosis. International friendship and co-operation has brought a new meaning to the students of West Bengal who have come to realise these in terms of life and happiness. Heroic students of our country abhor servile submission to deaths and diseases and are waging a valiant battle against those social evils which appear in garb of natural hazards. Our Prime Minister Mr. Nehru calls the younger generation most essential human material. As we are clearing away the darkness that surrounds this human material we expect our friend everywhere to stand beside us shoulder to shoulder offering practical cooperation.

When Students of India will enjoy fruits of freedom, their faces will be lit up with smiles, living in happiness, their sparkling eyes will shed friendliness for the people everywhere in the World.