

president, Neurological Society of India 1992.

1963 January was my first introduction, to the Neurological society of India at Calcutta. The occasion was the Annual meeting of the Association of physicians of India with whom the Neurological society of India used to meet earlier. Just a few months before the Indo-china War had taken place and the usual December, 62 meeting had been postponed to Jan '63. If memory serves me right barely 25 people attended the NSI meeting. The late Dr. Baldev Singh presided. There was some talk on the delay in Dr. Baldev Singh achieving the presidentship though he was a founding member. All this was however very civil without any acrimony or mention even in the GBM. The very young Dr. Ramamurthi came to where I and Dr. Taori were standing and introduced himself. Even then he was a famous face and we were for a few seconds quite shocked before I held out my hand to shake his proffered hand and introduced myself. It was a remarkable experience to meet this small community of neuroscientists. If I remember correctly the people there were Dr. Baldev Singh, Dr. Jacob Chandy, Dr. B. RamaMurthy, Dr. R. G. Ginde, Dr. R. N. Chatterji, Dr. Asoke Bagchi, Dr. R. N. Roy, Dr. S. Pathak, Dr. V. Viramni, Dr. P. N. Tandon (it was a first meeting also), Dr. E. P. Bharucha, Dr. N. H. Wadia, Dr. Arjun Dass, Dr. T. K. Ghosh and Dr. Gajendra Sinha. Dr. Baldev Singh in his presidential oration dealt with experimental aspects which then were awesome to my young eyes. Papers were leisurely read with no time pressure as there was more time available than papers' Discussions were extended and educative. The social programmes in the evenings were hilarious with alcohol flowing like water' During the banquet which had many of the legends of then Indian Medical world, after vain attempts to dance eventually crawled to their chairs and were carried to the buses and cars. The other memorable thing was the dinner packets - given to us during departure after the conference ended at the railway station by the organizers supplemented by a surreptitiously handed over bottle of Solan No. whisky bottle wrapped.

in Statesman of the same day, which gave us intellectual, gastronomic and spiritual support during the long train journey to Vellore.

The next annual meeting which happened to be the last A. P. I. with which N. S. I. met was held at Patiala. (Jan 1964) I did not attend. It was the awful cold which made it famous. Dr. Mathai fell ill due to the cold. Anyway it was a cold farewell to A. P. I. by NSI for the last time.

The 1964 (Dec) meeting was held at Bombay very likely at Matusri Hall. A sea change had taken place in the proceedings. Large number of papers had come and the attendance was close to 100, as there were large number of delegates who were not members of N. S. I. The memorable thing was a paper read by the late Prof. Satyanand which was the last paper before lunch on one of the days. The session was chaired by Dr. B. K. Anand who was President that year. I was sitting in the front row as the late Dr. Baldev Singh had made me sit by his side at the beginning of the session talking about Vellore. Dr. Satyanand was, if I remember correctly, talking of models of human behaviour which had little to interest the audience. After the customary time ended, Dr. Anand pressed the red bulb which was the only one. Most of the audience left as soon as he started talking. I suddenly realized that the entire audience was Dr. Baldev Singh and I. The podium had Dr. B. K. Anand and Dr. Satyanand. After another 5 minutes Dr. Anand started putting the light on and off. I breathed a sigh of relief as this was no more a subtle warning of end of time. After that what Dr. Satyanand did was to take my breath away. He didn't pause while talking, put a hand in his coat pocket, taking out a kerchief and screwed out the bulb out of its socket and put it in his pocket. He went on talking as if nothing had happened' By that time Dr. Baldev Singh had started to fidget and I of course was dying to run out of the hall. It is then that Dr. B. K. Anand got up from his chair and in very strong Punjabi asked him to stop, threatening to leave the hall. It is only then that the paper ended.

In 1979. I was elected Treasurer of N. S. I. The following 6 years, the first 3 as Treasurer followed by Secretary of N. S. I. were important years for me. The first thing I did was to regularize the roster of members. I noticed large number of members who had not paid dues for years or even attended meetings of N. S. I. It was a painful task as several were senior members. Some were my seniors at A. I. I. M. S. My last warning was a trifle ominous and harsh. Two responses I still remember. "How can you write such a letter to an ex president", the other was from an old teacher "I have no money to pay the old dues, I should have resigned earlier." The latter also told Anjali, my wife, that I was too strict, but I must continue to be so even if it affects those who are near and dear, was the late Dr. B. K. Bachhawat who was probably the last of the old style Gurus who taught by example starting from laboratory to home.

The large scale amendments to the constitution of N. S. I. were first undertaken by me during the Vellore NSI meeting. I was advised by everyone that I better be careful as there were too many seniors who would chew me up piece by piece. I was somewhat naughty in my strategy. I put up the proposal to the General body meeting on the day of the banquet. I also allowed discussions to go on and on. Thus insignificant points were discussed ad nauseum till it was time for the banquet which had been organised for all participants. By the time everyone was so tired. they just approved the bulk of the new proposals and N. S. I. had a good constitution and bye laws. Decision making by tiring participants is something I had learnt from Dr. V. Ramalingaswami, the then Director of A.I. I. M. S. I did put it to good use. consensus by exhaustion I feel is always the best.

The international congress of Neurological surgery in 1989 was heady days full of exhausting work. what was unique was the support of many. I must mention Dr. B. Ramamurthi and Dr. P. N. Tandon specially as they had such implicit faith in me that it forced me to rise, come up to their expectation. Much of the hard work for the International congresses was done by us from Neurosurgery which made it easy for the Secretary's of Neurology and Epilepsy Congresses. I was somewhat peeved at the lack of public acknowledgement for this but anyways Dr. Baldev Singh and Dr. K. S. Mani made up for my disappointment by personally thanking me.

My election as vice president of N. S. I. at Chandigarh was a controversial one. I have never spoken about it. However it is absolutely true that I broke no rule or convention. Contrary to popular belief this did not polarize neurologists and neurosurgeons. I am personally aware of many in either group who readily told me that they voted against or for me. I have repeatedly said that commitment to the Neurological Society should be the sole guiding force- Talking about different groups is much like the currently caste based politics being practised at the national level.

As I look back to my long association from 1963 to date, through every role - associate member to President. I think ours is a remarkable Society. Its diversity is its strength. Its the commonality which binds. Small measures of competition or even envy are good as they improve relationships. Subspecialization and formation of new groups or societies are a part of growth and development. What is important is not to forget the mother society. Neurology or neurosurgery or any other speciality e.g. Neuropathology, Neuro-anaesthesia, Neuro radiology etc. can never develop singly on their own. NSI is the only forum where all can meet. Even with differences, small jealousies and occasional heated exchanges, our family must remain together for survival and growth. I look forward to glorious days as we enter the next millennium.

Editor's note :

Initially I thought that I would cut the controversial statements in this very readable paper. But then I decided that it was best left unedited except for some minor correction in the language and style. As one of the very bold and affirmative surgeons with total commitment to all the work assigned to him, some of the actions and words of Prof. Banerji tend to be quite controversial. He has explained himself his knack of getting the 'consensus by exhausting' others which automatically would bring on bitter controversy-Well, after the decisions are made.

The secretaries of the World Congresses of Neurology and Epilepsy may have different view points than that of Prof. Banerji. Unfortunately, Prof, K. Srinivasan's paper is no match for this spicy paper and hence the other side of the story is left unsaid.

Prof. A. K. Banerji (born on 24 Nov 1935) was an Associate Professor of Neurosurgery when I was at AIIMS. He is a brilliant teacher, meticulous surgeon. hard task master but above all a wonderful person once you come to know him closely. He is now the Director of Vidyasagar Institute Mental Health and Neurosciences, New Delhi. Probably in a near future VIMHANS will give a running battle to NIMHANS.

K. R. Nair'