

**Address delivered by Dr. M.C. Chagla, Union Minister for Education
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India has produced many very eminent physicians and surgeons and it is quite right that the Academy like this should exist to confer honour and recognize the merit of distinguished men practicing medicine, surgery or doing medical research in our country. Now, this body exists, as it was pointed out, for advancement and promotion of medical sciences. Medical science has made tremendous advancement in the last forty or fifty years. Both medicine and surgery has been revolutionized, methods of diagnosis which some time ago were primitive have been changed radically, the system of treatment has changed and every day more knowledge is being derived about the human body. Today my emphasis is going to be not what this organization should do in the advancement of knowledge, in extending the horizon of knowledge but on the application of sciences to the needs of our society. We have to distinguish between scientific research and the application of science. We are doing it on the scientific side. The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research has 27 laboratories which intended to apply research for the good of society. And my suggestion to this organization will not merely to confine itself to scientific research but also to consider problems of application of that research for the good of society. I think the Government and all the authorities will listen with the greatest consideration to the advice that a body like this might give with regard to how medical research can be applied for the good of society. There are many problems that are facing our country today. Many of them perhaps are not of interest to medical men except as citizens and patriotic Indians. I am not going to deal with those problems. There is one particular problem with which I want to deal and to which I attach greatest importance, and that is the problem of family planning and birth control. I think only now we have begun to realize the importance of this problem. For many years we ignored it and neglected it. We refused to face the implications of this problem. Now it has been driven home to us that unless we squarely face this problem, tackle it and solve it, every other solution of other problems will be rendered futile and negative. I often think of the analogy of man writing on the sands of a sea shore. He writes very carefully with beautiful calligraphy and the waves of the sea come and wash it out. That is exactly the situation in our country. We want to increase our food production; we want to tackle the problem of unemployment; we want to give universal education to our boys and girls. All these problems are incapable of solution so long as our population grows up in a manner as it does. I think the medical profession can play a big part in helping us to solve this problem. Now let me deal with one or two arguments that are advanced even today against family planning and birth control. It is said that it is wrong, it is sinful to take a life. Now what is more sinful, what is more immoral is to bring a child into this world so that he should endure the misery, should add to the number of unemployed, should be illiterate and suffer from poverty or it is better to prevent such a life? You medical men know that out of millions of sperm only one fructifies. So the nature is very destructive; nature is very ruthless and this particular argument, as far as I am concerned, falls on deaf ears. It is then said that we are fighting with the processes of nature and that we are interfering with nature. People who say this forget that the whole of civilization itself is interference with the nature. We started as caveman. Today we have become civilized and the process of civilization is nothing else except fighting against nature. What has the medical profession done? It has constantly interfered with nature. It has prolonged life, it has wiped out epidemics. It has lowered individual mortality. All this is interference with nature. But unfortunately in our country while less number of children dies at birth than previously, while people live longer, while many epidemics have been wiped out, we have forgotten to fight on the other front, namely, the increasing population. Years gone by, nature arrived at its own solution. On the one hand the population grew up, and on the other there were epidemics, diseases and small wars and population kept its stability at its own level. But today we have advanced so fast on the one side, i.e. increasing the life span of people, improving our health services, we have not considered the effect of this on the other side. Ladies and Gentlemen, we have always been asking for a pill, a contraceptive pill which will solve our problem. I remember when I was Ambassador in Washington, I spoke on this subject on many occasions and I had to tell my American friends that "give us something as cheap as aspirin which we can distribute in millions to our people. At that time, American opinion was very

shy to think about birth control. That was not a respectable word. Things have changed now. You remember, President Johnson has asked his Government to give all information about the family planning and birth control to the countries that need it. That is definitely an advancement. Even Catholic Churches have made some advance on this rather controversial subject. But since those days I see in the US medical science has advanced and more research has been carried out on contraceptives for the purpose of family planning and birth control. As you know, the latest is this, Intra Uterine Device and what is called the "loop". It is something on which medical profession can go on making research. Some of our laboratories are doing it but it is very essential that the profession should, realize the great national importance of fighting on this front. Do not think only on the front of disease. Don't be fighting on the front of prolonging life. We have to fight on the front of preventing life if necessary, one starting life, in order that the standards of living in our country should improve.

I go further and I wish to mention a rather controversial subject and that is "Legalized Abortion". I am glad to say that discussions have been going on this subject. The other day there was a seminar in Delhi. I saw in today's papers that there has been another seminar in Bombay. As far as I know medical ethics only permit doctors to do abortion in order to save the life of the mother. It is not permissible for the doctor to perform abortion for any other purpose. As the time has come, when you must consider this matter rationally and as a nation which has grown up. As you know, Japan has reduced its birth rate by 50% by having legalized abortion. The problem of Japan is much smaller than our and we must consider as a serious minded men, as scientists, the future of our country whether we should not accept legalized abortion with certain care and caution. Now let me give you one or two instances. A woman is raped. She does not want a child in those circumstances, the doctor says she must have a child however much she will not want. But I go further that why should not a woman have a right to say; "I do not want to become a mother however the pregnancy might have been caused." We are told that legalized abortion will lead to immorality. That argument sounds correct. But morality is not based on contraceptives or lack of contraceptives. Morality is something much higher than that. If a man or a woman wants to be immoral, well, she will be immoral even though she may have no contraceptives at all or he or she may have to pay the consequences of illicit connection. Therefore this argument of morality has no relevance. What we have to consider is whether legalized abortion will help our country in keeping down population and bring about the necessary population control? If it helps us, I suggest to you that we should seriously consider what steps we should take to being about; whether we should not permit the doctor a greater latitude than he enjoys today with regard to helping a woman who does not want to become a mother.

The second important aspect I wish to place before you is the question of public health. I think medical men normally should look upon themselves as custodians of public health and it is their duty to help in this aspect of our life and society. Now when you talk of public health we should not think merely of health in a city. It is more important to think of public health in rural areas and it is here that the greatest assistance is needed from medical profession. Eighty percent of India lives in the villages. Public health in most part of it is in a terrible bad state. The Government is making every effort to reach the villages and provide medical facilities and public health workers in the villages. The task however is gigantic and unless fullest cooperation is received from the medical profession and medical scientists, it will be long before substantial improvement in the living standards can be made. It is regrettable that even protective water supply is not available in very large section of the rural population.

I am glad to know that the Academy had decided to start a high grade postgraduate examination. It is noticed that a large number of our young men spend considerable amount of time in foreign countries attempting to get a postgraduate degrees. While I am all for our medical men visiting Western countries for learning new techniques and methods and establishing contacts I am definitely against "diploma obtaining" in foreign countries.

Before concluding, I once again wish the Academy every success in its various programmes.