

Presidential Address Delivered by Dr. C.G. Pandit on the occasion of the 4th Annual Convocation of the IAMS

Dr. Deshmukh, Fellows and Members of the Academy, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me first welcome you all, old fellows and members of the Academy, and the new ones we are about to admit to our fold. We are indeed very happy that Dr. Deshmukh has honoured us his presence in our midst this afternoon and by agreeing to deliver the convocation address. Dr. Deshmukh needs no introduction. You will all agree that he is essentially an academician in the true sense of the word. To me personally this is a memorable occasion. I have known him since 1910, when we were at school together. I do not think any astrologer could have predicted then that he and I would meet like this, on the same platform, though I am sure any astrologer could have easily predicted what role he would be called upon to play in our national affairs!

Today, as an Academy we are four years old. Four years is admittedly too short a period in the existence of any institution. Even so it might be worth while to take a stock of what we have been doing, what we have achieved, and in the light of the experience gained, consider what we should do in future. Periodic stock-taking is essential in order to satisfy ourselves that we have really laid true and strong foundation for progress. The aims and objects of the Academy are indeed, broad based. In essence they cover many diverse fields in medicine, medical education, particularly at the post-graduate level, medical research, advancement of knowledge generally in basic as well as in clinical sciences, to scout for and recognize talent wherever we meet it, especially in younger scientists and above all, to study the major problems in health facing the country, and render advice to those who may ask for it to solve them. A formidable list, if I may say so! We must also remember that there are many professional organizations or associations, or councils solely devoted to achieve one or the other of the objectives mentioned above. Individually each one of us is connected in one way or another with these organizations, and collectively we may say, we also represent all of them. It should be our endeavour, therefore, not only to work in close collaboration with such bodies, but also to find new path ways to reach the desired goals.

It is in this context that I wish to dwell on some of our activities during the past year to which our Executive Director has referred in the annual report of the Academy. The Council had requested some of the Fellows of the Academy to deliver lectures on their own work, in institutions other than their own, in the country. It is gratifying to note that they readily accepted the assignment. The Council at one of its meetings suggested that efforts be made to ascertain the impact of such lectures on the development of new thought or newer techniques in the concerned disciplines at centres where the lectures were delivered. It was already apparent that a brief visit of a day or so could not be expected to achieve that end and that it was necessary for the lecturer to extend his stay at the Centre, discuss the subject in small groups, and demonstrate, if necessary, specialized techniques developed by the lecturer-in other words-implement the idea of a visiting professor in a miniature, so far as the time factor is concerned.

The Academy has fostered the traditional method of organizing seminars and symposia for furtherance of its objectives. These are, indeed necessary for creating newer opportunities for the constant and periodic concourse of men of science, so very essential for churning the milieu of scientific thought, and bringing out the nectar of truth, both in a figurative as well as in a practical sense.

However, looking back over the years, I have come to realize that perhaps in our enthusiasm to organize periodical conferences of scientific men, we are apt to forget that they are only "means to an end" and not ends in themselves. I perfectly agree with many of you that these seminars are not only desirable but essential to stimulate newer thinking, sort out the grain from the chaff and help in the progressive rise in scientific standards and evaluation of contemporary scientific efforts of our colleagues. It is also my firm conviction that the holding of such meetings is only a step in the whole

sequence of events. We are witnessing week in and week out, innumerable symposia organized by medical colleges, research institutes, professional associations and several other bodies. The very plethora of the symposia seems to smother the efforts of our scientists. Many of them have hardly the time to reflect and cogitate on the unsolved problems of their own work. I venture to suggest that in such an endeavour purely academic bodies like ours have a distinctive role to play. Our task does not merely end by lending our name to one symposium or other. Right from the decision to support a symposium, its planning, programming, conducting and evaluation, the Academy must have a scientific policy and outlook and judge for itself the worthwhileness or the utility of such periodic meetings. In other words, I wish to draw your particular attention that our primary objective is to create fresh stimuli for scientific thinking and for a collective impact on scientific research and not give monetary assistance to social gatherings of scientists. The impact may not necessarily be felt by immediate participants. Its influence can be felt by people from other disciplines as well, by generating new pattern of thinking. If the Academy is to fulfill these functions, it is essential that it should maintain a continuing interest over the whole range of activities of a symposium, and above all take stock of the benefits of such symposia by a very careful system of follow-up. Otherwise I am afraid, the Academy's efforts will be in no way different from those of other bodies engaged in similar pursuits. I hope the Council, as well as the Fellows of the Academy, will give serious thought to these aspects.

It is in this frame that I wish to look back on some of our activities during the last one year. The Academy was closely associated with the organization of a unique Seminar on Bone Diseases in collaboration with the WHO and the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences. Firstly, this symposium centred round the personality of Dr. Putschar who has made a life-long study of the development and disorders of bone metabolism and bone diseases in men as well as in animals. It is a matter for great satisfaction that our workers, clinical as well as non-clinical, had risen to the occasion by pooling together their rich and variegated pathological material. Such conferences, by whatever names they are called, are a real forum for the exchange of information. At the practical level, they are bound to stimulate our younger scientists to tackle biological problems in their whole range and variety and not merely rest contented with reports of unusual cases. The proceedings of this memorable seminar are now under print and will be available to a wider range of scientific workers who may not have had the good fortune of participating in the symposium. The participants themselves have returned to their institutions with interesting material which they themselves could use in their teaching programmes. In view of this, it would be very interesting if the Academy, which has invested a great deal of time and energy on the seminar, were to assess the impact of the symposium in terms of fresh lines of research stemming from the participants and their colleagues. I venture to suggest that in future it should be one of the functions of the Academy to keep abreast of these newer rumblings of scientific thought which it has quite rightly aided so far. It is essential that our activities are also organized on a regional basis in the country which will help us in scouting for talent and scientific leadership in the country. No doubt, a beginning has been made in this direction, but much remains yet to be done. No academic body can survive long enough if it fails in its primary function of being a continuous forum of exchange for scientific thought, not only amongst its Fellows, but also amongst their colleagues, and representatives of other scientific disciplines. While zonal activities have to be necessarily initiated by the local Fellows in an area, its platform must be thrown open to all enterprising young men and women, who in the words of Cervantes, are bent upon breaking the windmills of past-ages in their idealism of ushering in a newer scientific era.

I will now refer to yet another activity of the Academy-indeed an experiment-which it has only recently initiated-viz. the conduct of an examination for the admission of candidates to its membership. I may mention at the outset that there is some misconception in the minds of many, including some of our own Fellows, regarding the purpose behind the Academy taking this step. The misconception has arisen because, initially, the Ministry of Health had requested the Academy, among many other bodies, whether it would undertake conducting "national" examination in several disciplines, primarily to ensure uniformity of standards in the award of post-graduate

degrees. We are not aware of the present status of the proposal. We have, however, made it quite clear that in the step we have taken we are not attempting to hold a 'national' examination in the accepted sense of the word, and we have not sought 'recognition' from any body for the membership' which we might confer on those who appear before us. The step we have taken will, however, provide us with opportunities to experiment on the methodology of Examination particularly at post-graduate level.

I need hardly remind the Fellows that the subject of 'examination' has often been debated in national and international conferences on medical education. All are in agreement that it is difficult to find any other means to assess the merit of candidates, even though' the present methods of examinations and assessment are unsatisfactory'. In view of this paradoxical situation, the first medical educational conference held in Delhi in 1955, which was also attended by experts from other lands, passed a resolution suggesting "that it is necessary that scope should be given to experiments in assessment by such medical colleges as are willing to undertake them". Obviously for reasons which are well-known to you, no medical college in the country is yet in a position to do so. Hence the interest of the Academy in this field.

Let me, here, digress a little and consider what examinations are intended to achieve. They, indeed, have several functions, for they measure the progress of the student, set standards for accomplishment and above all, serve a useful purpose in administering the programme of education. What the Commission on medical education set up by the American Medical Colleges had to say in their final report in 1932, still holds good today. I quote from that report :

"Every patient in practice presents an examination for the physician for he must recall, select, apply and correlate knowledge necessary to deal with the problem selected. The art of recalling quickly and accurately, and of correlating facts which are so recalled, is one which can be acquired by training, and one for which every effort should be made to develop to the fullest extent in the physician.....Properly conducted examinations which are designated to test the students knowledge and grasp of the principles of medicine are an invaluable method of education to which more attention should be given". The Commission further added that "the conduct of such examinations impels the faculty also to look upon the problem of medical education as a unified whole, not as a series of more or less isolated and unrelated subjects".

This is then the crux of the problem. It has been truly said that more advance has been made in scientific knowledge in the last sixty years than during the preceding twenty centuries. We expect the students, the future doctors to assimilate that knowledge. When we hold an examination, we must be clear in our own minds what we wish to test, how to test, and how to interpret the results in terms of the future potentiality of the doctors and consultants whom we accredit on the basis of our examinations. It is, therefore our duty, as a body of academicians, to ensure that we not only institute a theoretically sound system of examinations, but also provide the wherewithal and the means for self study, scholarship and application to solve the day-to-day problems facing the country. It is for this reason that I used the word "experiment" quite deliberately in describing this, our new venture. For if we are going to conduct the examination according to the usual pattern, there is no need for the academy to embark on such a costly procedure, just to admit, admittedly deserving candidates to our Membership.

Fortunately there are now new avenues open to us to consider, experiment, and evolve a pattern suitable to our needs. Let me refer to some basic decisions which the Academy has taken in this regard. We are considering the feasibility of instituting multiple choice system of examinations for the purpose we have in view. It has, obviously, many advantages. It has also some serious limitations, at least at present, so far as our country is concerned. Our teachers and examiners must be aware of the basic techniques not only in the setting of the question paper but also in the assessment fo the answer papers. Indeed, the evaluation of the answer papers can be a formidable task, and requires the services of a competent educational psychologist. The multiple choice system

has almost become a science and like any other scientific discipline requires careful study. Nevertheless, it appears worth the effort both in time and money. It is hardly necessary for me to point out that the Royal College of Physicians in England have already taken the decision to adopt the system with appropriate modifications. Indeed, it has already been suggested that the pattern of examination evolved by that body might be quite suitable for adoption by us in our country. The Academy is seriously engaged in considering all these facts of the problem. It is considering the feasibility of organizing a workshop for the purpose. Once the basic principles are worked out and the utility of the method demonstrated, the Academy would have fulfilled its role. Our examination for membership would be the testing ground for this purpose. Let me point out the Academy is not in conflict either with the Universities, or the governmental agencies in promoting this scientific endeavour. On the other hand, the Academy would whole-heartedly welcome active support and collaboration from the Universities and professional organizations interested in this problem. At any rate who could deny that this is indeed a fruitful field for our Academy to consider seriously?

Ladies and gentlemen, before I conclude I would like to leave one thought with you. If you were to look into the historical development of similar academies in other parts of the world, you would soon realize that some academies came into existence because of Governmental action, for the governments concerned felt the need to have a body to which they can turn for advice in the solution of the urgent problem facing them, while in others, the scientific societies already in existence have assumed the role and status of an academy by virtue of their performance and the scientific status of their Fellows. Our Academy, on the other hand, owes its existence to the initiative taken by some of us, no doubt with the benevolent support from the Government the Ministry of Health. We are indeed grateful to that Ministry for granting us almost complete autonomy in the initiation of any scientific endeavour we consider worthwhile. We have, therefore, to justify the trust placed in us. Let us accept the challenge!