

**BEGINNINGS OF ANAESTHESIA AT BIR HOSPITAL**

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The first examination for D.A. was held in the U.K. in 1935 A.D., the first examination in India was held in 1946 at Bombay and the first Indian Society of Anaesthetists Conference was held at Bombay in 1949. In this connection it will not be out of place to mention something about the development of Anaesthesia in Nepal. I shall try to give a brief sketch. Due to vicissitudes of occasional changes in administration and offices, satisfactory and reliable records are not available to me but I should inform you that Bir Hospital was started some 73 yrs back by the then Prime Minister Bir Shumser J.B. Rana in the year 1947 B.S. i.e. 1891 A.D. Hospitals were started at Birgunj, Nepalgunj and Butole during his regime. These hospitals were then run with doctors from India. In the hospitals there used to be more surgical than medical cases, as the popular apprehension and false notion that doctors poison their patients when they think that their cases are incurable, was so strong. As such, most of the medical cases were treated under the Ayurvedic System successfully by the experienced and qualified Vaidyas. Due to this the Vaidyas had a good reputation in high aristocratic circles too. The existence of Singha Durbar Vaidya Khana still run by H.M. Govt. authenticates the above statement. The exact method of anaesthesia that used to be administered during the first 20 yrs. could not be known. It was in 1918 that the first two Nepali Doctors (the late Dr. Ganesh Lal Maskey who expired only 2yrs. back and late Dr. Devi Prasad Upadhyaya, who expired some 25 yrs. back) both qualified from Bengal, had joined their service at Bir Hospital. I remember having seen Dr. Devi Prasad administering anaesthesia with Junker's Chloroform Apparatus and Ether Mask. There was no post of Anaesthetist and the duty was therefore everybody's and nobody's. Hence doctors, compounders, dressers and nurses at hand were asked to do this job to run the department. These old compounders, dressers and nurses staffs still practise surgery, medicine, midwifery and gynaecology not only in Tarai and Hilly areas, but still in the Kathmandu Valley where skilled specialists are available.

I do remember how Dr. Devi Prasad used to be literally dragged down by the arms while running the O.P.D. for giving "fus fus" (hospital name for anaesthesia due to the sound of bellows). When I joined my service in 1933 A.D. there was a constant shortage of doctors; they had to be deputed to different parts of the country at times. Hence during the absence of Dr. Devi Prasad it fell to my lot to be dragged from O.P.D. duty to give anaesthesia. Gentleman, frankly speaking without the knowledge of fundamentals of anaesthesia and of the equipment, I had to do this job. I used to put Junkers Chloroform Apparatus Mask not very close to patient's face and start with low concentration of Chlo-

reform vapour asking the patients to count one, two, three. When the patients stopped counting, the Mask was directly placed on the mouth and nose and holding the jaw up, I used to follow with the douche method of administering anaesthesia i.e. pouring ether on the Mask then placing a towel on the mask. Relaxation of the muscles followed with the loss of eyelid reflexes and at this stage the case was regarded to be fit for operation. Of course, very few major cases were done in those days and I should say, due to the graciousness of providence, the death rate was amazingly low except in some acute abdominal cases in which death could hardly be avoided. Some twenty years back a few cases of gastrojejunostomy, appendicectomy, prostatectomy, C-Section, hysterectomy, operation for ovarian cyst and tumour, tonsillectomy, mastoidectomy and eye operations were done by certain surgeons with me with the technique of open drop method that I have mentioned. Times changed and I became the first man to be appointed as an anaesthetist to H.M. Govt. in 1952 A.D. It will be no exaggeration to say that the history of modern anaesthetic techniques at Bir Hospital started after 1956 A.D. following my training and qualification in anaesthesia.

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*Editor*