

Gandhi and Health @ 150: Footprints of ICMR's Century-long Journey. Collector's Edition. Balram Bhargava, Rajni Kant, A. Annamalai and Abhay Bang (eds). The Indian Journal of Medical Research, Vol. 149, No. 1, January (Suppl.) 2019. 157 pages. Price: Unpriced.

In times of turmoil, if one looked up to Gandhi's views, one would certainly come across a saying or two or a life lesson that could show the way out. Gandhi had his own worldview on almost every aspect of life. In these times of changing health and disease profile of the nation, Gandhiji's views on health, which are often not discussed in the mainstream, perhaps have a lot of relevance. If he was alive he would have turned 150 this year. He wanted to live for 125 years. For a man who did not just experiment with truth, but also with his health seeking behaviours, perhaps he would have certainly crossed that land mark year.

As India is celebrating the Mahatma's 150th birth anniversary, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has brought out this special edition. It is a collector's edition and therefore is less like a journal and more like a book. Given the fact that the articles in the book loosely follow the referencing style of *Indian Journal of Medical Research (IJMR)* but not the typical structure of a journal article they appear more like book chapters. This structure certainly makes it so much more enticing for both a lay reader and a science connoisseur to own a copy.

Gandhiji, known as father of the nation, was a multifaceted person with tremendous courage of conviction, ability to fight for justice using uniquely non-violent means, determination to reach out to the unreached, empathy for the poor, for whom health and nutrition were problems then and continue to be now.

ICMR, particularly *IJMR* deserves to be congratulated for bringing out such a well thought out compilation of articles which show what a visionary Gandhi was. A message from the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a detailed interesting editorial by Rajni Kant, Balram Bhargava (Secretary DHR & DG, ICMR) and J. P. Nadda (the then Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare) provide a glimpse of what is to follow in the hard-back volume. A unique feature of the volume is that it includes a wide collection of rare vignettes and snapshots from Gandhi's life, his health records, copies of his ECG reports, physician prescriptions, pictures of the medical equipment (like the sphygmomanometer, the weighing scales) which add a lot of value. Of course a few readers may wonder why some pictures have been touched up and/or converted to colour but the publication thought these changes were absolutely necessary in this new age world. This collector's edition was released by His Holiness the Dalai Lama on 20th March 2019 at McLeod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh. It has 21 chapters that are divided under four broad themes – (i) Health: An important aspect of Gandhi's life; (ii) Through the pens of Gandhian followers; (iii) ICMR efforts to combat diseases and malnutrition imbibing Gandhian philosophy, and (iv) Gandhi and health through medical student perspective. The limitation of the chapters not including summary or abstract which would have made reading easier for those who may not have the time to read through the entire chapters, is in a way compensated by including a number of pull-quotes and highlighted excerpts.

The exposition on medical legacy of Gandhi deals with his relief work during plague outbreak in Rajkot in the late 19th century and in Johannesburg during his South Africa days, his ambulance and nursing work in the South African Zulu War (1899–1900) and the Bambatha Rebellion (1906) and in London during World War I (1914) is an indication of his concern for the needy and service to mankind. The well brought out exhortations of Gandhi about hygiene, observations on diseases among African miners in South Africa and his anti-leprosy work in India offer newer insights into his hitherto less talked about facets.

Gandhiji's key mantras to health – cleanliness, developing villages, physical activity, mental strength, healthy mother

and child, nutrition and caring for those with disease – have also been documented well with their modern day relevance. Despite his emphasis on health, wellness, physical activity and nutrition, Gandhiji had his share of ailments (piles, malaria, dysentery, hypertension, appendicitis, exhaustion and others), and these have been chronologically listed in the first chapter. Gandhi was a believer in nature cure and holistic medicine which included regular walks, fasting, balanced vegetarian diet (without even milk), earth and water treatment, personal and environmental hygiene and yoga as prescription for health and treatment of diseases. The latter must have made the life of physicians who may have wanted to treat him with modern medicine difficult. However he always had an open mind and believed in allowing winds of change to blow without blowing him over. Thus, in his later life when he was operated for piles by Dr Dalal (1919) and appendicitis (1924) by Col Maddock he started appreciating the research and the importance of modern medicine.

Among chapters from the followers of Gandhiji, of special interest is the chapter by Abhay Bang – Meeting the Mahatma. Abhay, a physician who runs an NGO SEARCH with his wife Rani had not met the Mahatma, but spent his early life in the Gandhi Ashram at Wardha, his father being a Gandhian. The inspiration was so strong that he feels the presence of the Mahatma as a kind of grandfather who is always with him. Among the others, Annamalai, Director, National Gandhi Museum, writing many instances of Gandhi's experiments with health also provides an engaging account of the episode of Kasturba's delivery that Gandhi carried out himself.

The article on sanitation and health discussing Gandhiji's belief that cleanliness is next to godliness, interestingly takes one through the journey of *Sulabh-Shauchalayas* and how they have proven strong pillars in achieving the goal of a clean nation. It also talks about the game changer *Swachh Bharat Mission* that has led our country to almost get rid of open defecation. Mark Lindley's American view of Mahatma's Empirism looks into Gandhiji's perspective on palliative care and euthanasia, artificial birth control and sexual self-restraint, subsidized healthcare and quackery.

The third section of the book attempts to live up to the subtitle of the book

'Footprints of ICMR's century-long journey' and provides an exhaustive chronicle of ICMR's efforts to combat communicable and non-communicable diseases, maternal & child health disorders and malnutrition and how they align to the Gandhian philosophy. For instance, the growth of ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) and nutrition research in India is almost inseparable just as Mahatma's life and India's freedom movement are. The chapter on Gandhi's views on nutrition and balanced diets highlight that Mahatma was a keen researcher and he kept his constant search on for the perfect food for humankind to keep body, mind and soul in a sound condition, just as NIN through its 100 year-long odyssey has been endeavouring to find simple and practicable solutions to empower the nation nutritionally. Gandhiji used to have long conversation with NIN's founding Director Robert McCarrison. The interactions of these two giants lead a formidable exchange of lay views into research and vice-versa.

Preventive prescriptions of healthy environment and nutrition that Gandhi suggested hold good even today. Gandhiji urged for need-based rather than greed-based consumption. The idea of sustainable consumption to ensure sustainable development has become extremely vital today in the era of climate change and global warming. Gandhiji experimented on himself by trying out different foods, of plant origin. He believed in diversity and local self-sufficiency in food production. These indeed are what scientists are advocating today.

The last section 'Gandhi and Health: through medical student's perspective' gives the award winning essay of C. H. Shafneed on Gandhi and Health. The essay lists some of the present day efforts in India towards the Gandhian philosophy of health is wealth and its relevance for national development.

When Gandhi was assassinated in 1948, Jawaharlal Nehru bemoaned that light had gone off. 'He showed us the path of truth, non-violence, commitment and serving the humanity with eco-friendly and community acceptable approaches'. The Gandhian way of leading a simple life by eating minimal and healthy food, exercising regularly, practicing meditation and cleanliness are indeed the saviours of the nation heading toward the modern-age health debacle. In conclusion, this edition of *IJMR* is an

honest compilation of Gandhi's views, practices, beliefs and experiments in health.

We have all lost and found Gandhi in many ways. We may have our own views on Gandhian philosophy – some concurring and the others differing with his. Whatever be our view, to support or contradict his philosophy one needs to know what he thought, felt and did. This book provides that necessary information and insights into Gandhi's views on health and therefore makes it a must read for all those who want to harness their scientific temper. And no better occasion to do so than his 150th birth anniversary.

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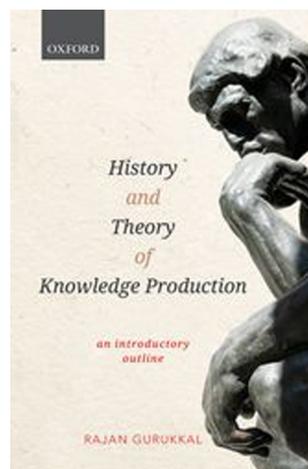
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History and Theory of Knowledge Production. An Introductory Outline. Rajan Gurukkal. Oxford University Press, 2/11, Ground Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002. 2019. x + 308 pages. Price: Rs 995.

Books reviewed in *Current Science* are usually authored or edited by scientists.

The book presently under review is written by Rajan Gurukkal, an eminent historian, thinker and educationist. The book is, however, rich in scientific content. Gurukkal is no stranger to the Indian scientific community. He has been involved with the *Indian Journal of History of Science* published by the Indian National Science Academy. Furthermore, he has been a Visiting Professor at the Centre for Contemporary Studies at the Indian Institute of Science, in between his assignments as Vice-Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam and the Chairman of the Kerala Higher Education Council. Much of the book was written when Gurukkal was working in the Indian Institute of Science. Central to the narrative in the book is the history of production of scientific knowledge. Of course, the book contains much else. The book has been written with intimidating thoroughness and contains material well beyond my immediate area of competence. Therefore, it was with some trepidation that I undertook the review of the book. However, I strongly felt that this splendid book should be brought to the attention of the Indian scientific community. That is the main motivation for the present attempt.

The book contains seven chapters. The first is entitled 'Introduction' and the last 'Summing up'. The gist of the discussion in the entire book can be gleaned from these two chapters. However, that should not discourage a serious reader from carefully reading the chapters in between which provide an intellectual fare of high quality.

The approach adopted by the author in studying the history and theory of knowledge production, is enunciated in the second chapter. Knowledge production is as old as humankind itself and has involved complex and multifarious processes. The method followed by the author is historical, with special emphasis on historical materialism. Knowledge production is intimately related to social formation. Social theory of knowledge evolved over centuries. However, the author asserts that 'Marx's theory of social formation is the most comprehensive framework for analysing as well as interpreting the nature, position and function of knowledge in relation to the socio-economic aggregate in time and space.' Many, including myself, believe that the status of Marxism in social sciences is akin to that of Darwinism in biology. In