An ode to my alma mater – Madras Medical College

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The Government General Hospital, one of the premier Institutions in the country, was started on 16 November 1664, as a small hospital to treat the sick soldiers of the East India Company. It was the untiring and inspired efforts of Sir Edward Winter, an agent of the Company that the first British hospital at Madras was established.

The entire peninsula was gradually conquered and annexed to the property of the East India Company. Therefore the medical needs also increased, which was also compounded by the increased number of epidemics and frequent battles.

This naturally necessitated the start of the general hospital on 10 November 1664, in a private house rented from an English man named Cogan, at a value of 2 pagodas (Rs.6/- now) per month. It housed 8 to 10 British soldiers of the garrison.

In its early days the hospital was housed at the Fort St. George and in the next 25 years grew into a formal medical facility. Governor Sir. Elihy Yale was instrumental in the development of the Hospital and gave it a new premise within the Fort in 1690.

This hospital was shifted to 13 locations before it was eventually established at its present site in 1772. (Formerly called Hog hill) The Hospital moved out of the Fort after the Anglo French War and it took 20 long years before it could settle in the present permanent location in 1772.

By the year 1772, the hospital was training Europeans, Eurasians and natives in allopathic methods of diagnosis and treatment and preparation of medicines. These trained

personnel were posted to various dispensaries in the district headquarters of the then Madras Presidency to assist qualified doctors.

By 1820, the institution had the recognition as the model hospital of the East India Company. In 1827, Dr. D. Mortimer was appointed as the Superintendent of the Hospital. A private medical hall run by Dr. Mortimer was regularized as the medical school. It was fortunate for the hospital and medical school that a unique personality, named Dr. D. Mortimer was made superintendent of the hospital in 1827. He took great pains to teach. During the afternoons all the apprentices and pupils formed the class and he taught them pre-clinical sciences and ordered them to copy certain portions of the printed book on physiology.

The Madras Medical School, the forerunner of the college was opened by Hon. Sir Frederick Adams, the Governor of Madras on 2 February 1835 in the face of stiff opposition from the Medical Board (Fig. 1). This Medical College was born out of the womb of the hospital because for about half a century before the starting of Medical School in 1835, training of local candidates, officially designated Europeans, Eurasians and natives, was undertaken by the staff of the hospital. This training came under two categories. Those of European descent were enrolled as medical apprentices. Year by year they were upgraded as assistant apothecary, second apothecary and apothecary. The natives were enrolled as first as medical pupil and upgraded as 'second native dresser' and then first native dresser and finally just dresser. There were no regular preclinical classes for them but they were taught in detail allopathic methods of diagnosis, treatment and follow up and detailed methods of preparing medicines and dressing etc. They were required to keep individual information (case sheets) of each patient under their care. These trained personnel were later posted to help the duly qualified physicians and surgeons heading the medical departments in the head quarters of various districts of Madras

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Presidency as well as various military camps and garrisons all over the Peninsula. This method started to improve and popularize allopathic medicines in South India.

The object of the government in establishing the first institution of this kind in South India was a modest one but according better means of instruction in medical science of the service under the presidency. The foundation of the school was an epoch in the annals of the department and the effects were soon realized. It raised the status of a subordinate to such a high level that there was no comparison between the man who passed through its portals and the pre 1835 bannervis-a-vis, who did not have this advantage.

The school began with 10 European medical apprentices and 11 native medical pupils. The teaching staff comprised surgeon D. Mortimer, superintendent, Surgeon George Harding as assistant superintendent along with two Assistant warrant officer, Assistant Apothecary D' Beaux and dresser T.S. Muthuswamy Mudaliar.

The Superintendent and his assistants were men of exceptional merit and ability. In 1842, the hospital opened its doors to Indians. In the early part of 1850, the school council submitted a proposal to the Government to accord this institution the higher designation of "College" remarking that this change in designation would lend to its professional status. The Government granted this request and on 1st October 1850, the Madras Medical School became the Madras Medical College Figs. 2, 3, 4. The first batch of students who went through the senior course successfully passed out in 1852 was granted the Diploma of Graduate of the Madras Medical College. The College continued to award this diploma till 1857 when it became affiliated to the newly formed Madras University, which then commenced to award medical degrees, MBChB of 5 year duration and LMS (Licentiate in Medicine & Surgery).

In the next two decades, the teaching staff had increased the duration of the course and extended the curriculum, which was made comprehensive. Senior courses spanning 5 years were started and private people were also admitted for the first time to the institution.

The institution holds the pride of place, in having the first lady doctor in the English speaking world and the first Indian lady doctor also graduated from this school. MMC, the first medical college in the world which opened its doors to women students at a time when no other medical school in the, British Empire did so. Dr. Schorleib the first woman doctor in the world and Dr. Muthulaxmi Reddy the first woman graduate from India graduated from MMC.

After affiliation in 1857, the College moved to be a centre of excellence imparting training in all the specialties of medicine and surgery and it is now one of the premier institutions in the country with under graduate, post graduate and super specialty courses.

The present location and boundaries of Madras Medical College, Government General Hospital, Chennai spans in the north by the E.V.K. Road, south by the Cooum River, east by Fort. St. George and in the west by the Central Jail. The total extent of area, 47.5 acres has various special departments, namely:

Bradfield surgical block (Fig. 5)

This block was opened in 26 March 1934 by his Excellency Sir George Stanley P.G, G.C.S.I, G.C.I.E, C.M.G and Governor of Madras (1929–1934). In this building the entire surgical department was housed from where the speciality departments like neurosurgery, cardiothoracic, gastroenterology, urology, orthopedics branched out.

Dr. Achanta Lakshmipathi block for neurology

The foundation stone was laid in 8 March 1968 by the chief minister of Tamilnadu, Mr. C. N. Annadurai. Later in 19 February 1972, the building was opened by the president of India Dr. V. V. Giri, and inaugurated by Thiru. K. K. Shah, Governor of Madras. The man behind in creating this historic building is none other than Dr. B. Ramamoorthy, the renowned neurosurgeon of the world.

Cardiology block

The foundation stone was laid by Honourable Shri M. Bhakthavatchalam in 13 April 1966 and the corner stone of the building was laid by Helen. B. Taussig M.D., Professor Emeritus of John Hopkins University, USA under the president ship of Dr. A. L. Mudaliar the vice chancellor of madras university in 10 November 1966. The building was inaugurated by the chief minister of Tamilnadu Thiru. M. Karunanidhi in 7 April 1972.

Padmashri Dr. C. S. Sadasivam, the great cardiothoracic surgeon of our country was pioneer in bringing up this block to take care of the people with cardiac ailments. The technique of controlling the bleeding varices in portal hypertension was popularized by him and it still holds the test of its time.

Surgical gastroenterology

This department was the first started under the able guidance of Prof. N. Rangabashyam, in the year 1975. Under his leadership the department has grown and it has crossed 25-years. The Department under the leadership of Prof. N. Rangabashyam also acquired the endoscopes, diagnostic laproscope and Nd-Yag laser. He was responsible for making Indian Gastroenterology work known all over the world by his National and International presentations and publications. He devised a retractor for doing vagotomy procedure.

Fig. 1 Inaugural stone of Madras Medical College

Fig. 2 Anatomy department, red fort block

Fig. 3 Seminar hall, a part of the original college building

Fig. 4 Seminar hall, after renovation

Fig. 5 Government General Hospital old building, houses Bradfield Surgical Block

From such a small beginning in the 17th century, the hospital and the college, staffed only by British surgeons for the benefit of soldiers, now has mushroomed into a medical monolith comprising of various institutions and hospitals and offering hope and remedy to all people irrespective of man made barriers of caste, creed or colour not only belonging to Tamil Nadu but also the entire Peninsula.

The existing Regional Institute of Ophthalmology was attached to this college. This hospital started in 1819 was the first eye hospital in India and second oldest in the world. The oldest eye hospital in the world is the Moorfields Ophthalmology hospital situated in London, which was started in 1818, just one year before this institute was started.

The Obstetrics and Gynecology department under the banner Institute of Obstetrics and Gynecology was started in July 1844 on the banks of Cooum River and later shifted to its present site at Pantheon road. The hospital was designed in such a way that it resembles a female pelvis. Among the early pioneers was James Shaw who taught midwifery to the students for 22 years in Madras Medical College. The other Personalities associated with this institute are Sir Arcot Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, Dr. Thampan and Dr. Krishna Menon. During Dr. Krishna Menon's tenure this institute earned a name in this country and abroad as a centre of training and research in O & G

An interesting anecdote relating to Dr. A. L. Mudaliar, who was a gynecologist and the first Indian principal of MMC and vice chancellor of Madras university for more than 25 years:

Wearing a long white coat, with a moustache, and a turban over his head and a 'naamam' over his forehead he would quiz his students with the following question regarding the birth of the twins. "If there was a problem would you save the first baby and sacrifice the second?". Most students would agree that this would be their course of action. He would triumphantly declare, "if that was the situation, I wouldn't be here to teach you."

Dr. K.C. Nambiar, F.R.C.S., an eminent surgeon recalls his experience. After learning about the queue system in U.K, he wanted to introduce that in our country. In 1938 with the help of Col. Cruickshank, Col. Skinner and the sisters of the hospital all stood in a queue at the general hospital gate which moved in slowly. This was the First Queue in India.

Charles Donovan, who was born in 1863 and gained his M.D. from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1889, became the Professor of Physiology at Madras Medical College and Superintendent of Royapettah Hospital after joining the Indian Medical Service. This was after active service on the North-West Frontier. He discovered the causative agent of the disease kala-azar in what were later named "Leishman-Donovan bodies". In 1905, Donovan described the intracellular bodies, which bears his name and was the co discoverer of the etiological agent in kala-azar. The so called 'Donovan bodies' were found in the exudates, from an oral lesion of the disease in a ward boy of General Hospital in Madras.

Fig. 6 Government General Hospital, new building

The most ancient teaching institution in India – The Madras Medical College which was started formally on 13th February 1835, stands prestigiously till date as a rambling historic symbol. The genesis of this college did take many years to transform from where it started and where it stands today.

During British period a medical degree from MMC enabled a doctor to register and practice in Great Britain and her colonies. Such privileges may no longer be existent, but MMC and its counterpart the general hospital, as the oldest medical institutions in the world still remains, both professionally and architecturally, in the annals of the history of medicine and a familiar landmark of Madras, presently Chennai (Fig. 6).

Chronological events

1664	Madras General Hospital was started
1753	MMC was founded
1853	Madras medical college started
	First woman doctor of the world – Schorleib studied at MMC
	First woman doctor of India – Muthulaxmi Reddy studied at MMC
1905	Donovan bodies discovered in GGH
1938	First queue system was introduced in general hospital
1970	First open heart surgery
1989	First CABG