

THE TRIAL OF BINAYAK SEN

Why has *The Lancet* written an editorial about an Indian pediatrician. Binayak Sen is no ordinary man – pediatrician, socialist, revolutionary - almost the poster boy of the “socially conscious doctor”.

The story begins in Vellore. A pediatrician is trained in Christian Medical College. He then goes to work for the rural poor in Madhya Pradesh. Besides voluntary work he actively helps the government in conceptualizing and designing various programs in Chhattisgarh which finally go on to provide the model for the ASHA of the National Rural Health Mission. He is even a member of the State Advisory Committee on Health Sector Reforms at one time in Chhattisgarh. Then he becomes closely involved in the setting up of a hospital for independent union of workers in the iron ore mines. He is also the National Vice-President of the People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) and General Secretary of its Chhattisgarh unit. There he helps organize numerous investigations into alleged human rights violations carried out during anti-Naxalite operations.

On 14 May 2007, Sen is arrested in Bilaspur on the charges of acting as a courier between jailed Naxalite leader Narayan Sanyal and businessman Piyush Guha, also accused of having links with Naxalites. Since his arrest there are protests from academics worldwide including nobel laureates, editorials in the *BMJ* and *The Lancet*, doctors all over India and even a call from Amnesty International to immediately release him. He has been languishing in various jails till May 2009.

However on 24 December 2010, the Additional Sessions and District Court finds him guilty of sedition for helping the Maoists in their fight against the state and has again sentenced him to life imprisonment.

Why should a man honoured with numerous awards including the Paul Harrison award for a lifetime of service to the rural poor, R.R. Keithan Gold Medal by The Indian Academy of Social Sciences, Jonathan Mann Award for Global Health and Human Rights be subjected to such trauma? Politics finally determines health on a very large scale so to produce very powerful changes in public health and we as pediatricians cannot remain isolated from politics. (*The Hindu* 9 January 2011, *The Lancet* 8 January 2011)

REFORMING THE MBBS PROGRAM IN INDIA

Today the MBBS degree holder in India feels inadequate to handle many common problems. Where are the lacunae? An 8 member Working Group of the MCI chaired by George Mathew of the Christian Medical College Vellore has come up with many laudable recommendations. It is proposed to change the program into a competency based module with clinical training from the first year itself. It has advised a detailed and extensive review of the curriculum to remove what is obsolete and outdated. A major integration of basic science, laboratory science and clinical medicine has been mooted. Improving the link to local health system and Community health centres, options for distance education in certain fellowships and diplomas and focus on providing health care to the needy and disadvantaged has also been highlighted. It has also suggested that the intake of medical students be doubled to achieve the world average doctor population ratio of 1.5: 1000 by 2031. (*The Hindu* 2 January 2011)

Gouri Rao Passi,
gouripassi@hotmail.com