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Special Article

Adding moments to history of Anesthesia of Nepal: Truth or fiction?

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Abstract

This article describes about a person who might have served as anesthesia provider during 1930s at the Bir Hospital, Kathmandu, Nepal. However, concrete evidence of the person's work as an anesthesia provider has not been found yet.

Keywords: Anesthesia; History; Nepal



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One warm afternoon in April, I received an email that created goosebump on me. The subject of the letter was 'early anesthetists'. The person had written about his grandfather Ashapati Tamrakar (1904-1942 AD) of Maru, Kathmandu, who served as an anaesthetist at Bir Hospital in the 1930s. According to him, Mr Ashapati Tamrakar worked with Dr Suresh Das Gupta, a senior surgeon in Bir

Hospital. Mr Tamrakar also served as a dresser at Campbell Medical School and Hospital in Kolkata. He had attached a certificate of his grandfather who served as a dresser, but, unfortunately, he did not provide any official record that he was trained as an anaesthetist. A photo showing Ashapati Tamrakar (left) and Dr Das Gupta (right) in the operation theatre at Bir Hospital in 1938 (Figure 1).

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The photograph shows a patient probably with huge ascites and protruding umbilicus lying on a table and a person holding mask on the patient. According to the person who wrote the email, the person holding the mask is Mr Ashapati Tamrakar and the other person is Dr Suresh Das Gupta. The person, however, did not reply to any further emails.

The search in the internet revealed a wikipedia page in the name of Ashapatti Tamrakar.¹ The page describes about Ashapatti Tamrakar, his early life, his medical practice including his work as an anesthetist at Bir hospital and his forward-mindedness.

No other reports of anesthesia services of that time have been identified. A search at Bir Hospital archive could not give any results to support or decline these facts.

Professor Roshana Amatya, in her article on history of anesthesia in Nepal, states that "There is very little evidence regarding the use of anesthesia in Nepal before 1933. In those days, either a doctor or paramedical staffs who could pour drop after drop of chloroform or ether were considered an anesthetist. Usually the surgeons carried out anesthesia by delegating untrained juniors or paramedics to do the job."² If we follow the definition by Professor Amatya, the man holding the mask should be considered as an anesthesia provider of that time. The person holding the mask is very similar to the person named Ashapatti Tamrakar in the wikipedia page.

Another document by Professor Hemang Dixit on early days of Bir Hospital confirms the presence of Dr Suresh Chandra Dass Gupta at that time in 1930s as chief medical officer who had good hands of a surgeon.³ The document also tells us about Dr Devi Prasad Upadhyay who performed the duties of an anesthetist before the first diploma holder in anesthesia DR Bhabani Bhakta Singh Pradhan joined in 1956. There is a photograph of the doctors and assistants with Dr Dass Gupta. However, that document does not tell anything about Mr Tamrakar.

An email was sent to a four senior anesthesiologists (Prof R Amatya, Prof GR Bajracharya, Prof BD Jha, and Prof BK Bhattacharai) regarding their opinion on Mr Ashapati Tamrakar as first known anesthesia provider of Nepal. The opinion were similar and all of the senior anesthesiologists agreed to the fact that they were not aware of Mr Tamrakar. They all have agreed that we have to find more evidence to support the fact mentioned in the email. If the person holding the mask is Mr Tamrakar, and the second person is Dr Das Gupta, and if the photograph was taken in 1930s at Bir hospital, then Mr Ashapati Tamrakar can be considered as the first known anesthesia provider of Nepal. However, the current evidence neither supports nor rejects the fact that Mr Tamrakar was the first anesthesia provider of Nepal.

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