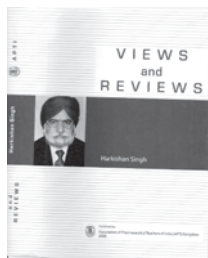


# Book Review

## VIEWS AND REVIEWS

Harkishan Singh

### Lessons in Writing, Documenting and Archiving.....



Knowledge has been passed on from generation to generation by various means. Cultural variations are common and affect knowledge transfer. Talking, listening, understanding, writing [documenting], and archiving are essential steps in this process. Culturally, Indians, and Westerners differ greatly in these steps. Devdutt Pattanaik, writing in Economic Times<sup>1</sup> said and I quote in parts, "It is said that when Vyas [a sage of huge wisdom] narrated the epic Mahabharata, the elephant headed Ganesha served as his scribe and using his tusk as his pen wrote the epic on palm leaf manuscripts". But who read his book? Mahabharata, typically comes to us, not in a book form, but as a narration made by Sauti, the bard, to Shaunaka, the sage, in the Naimisha forest. Sauti heard the tale from his father who in turn heard it from Vaishampayana, who narrated it at the great snake sacrifice of Janamejaya, king of Hastinapur. Vaishampayana had learnt it from Vyas, his teacher. This preference for the 'spoken word' over 'the written word' in the mythological realm is a reflection of the Indian psyche. Indians prefer to say things, and hear things, rather than read things and write it down. Even Veda [treatise of knowledge of self, god and life], the collection of mantras [hymns], which contain the most primal of Hindu thoughts, are said to be '*Shruti*'-that which was heard. Revelation came to the sages in the form of divine whisper- an auditory communication. Indians are no wonder called '*Bahusrutas*' [learners by multiple listening and reciting by memory, starting from the multiplication tables or *padhes*].

Contrast this "with Biblical tradition where God communicated his commandments in the form of ten laws written on two stone tablets that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai". It is also understood that wherever Christianity went replicates of

the stone slab [Xeroxes??] were made and carried. This clearly articulates of the cultural differences in matters of communication.

If we fast forward to today, Indians are still considered wanting in 'documentation', as is evidenced by the huge efforts that are seen in the Indian Pharma Industry to meet the US FDA Guidelines for any drug approvals. Westerners believe and subscribe to the dictum, "what is not documented is not done" while many Indians believe "If I say, then it is true and is done".

This dilemma is equally applicable when it relates to anything that we do in the area of research publications, professional articles, talks delivered in scientific/professional meetings- symposia-conference-workshops. How many of us document all these, preserve for posterity. Many would not even have a copy of all their research publications which we value when we worked to publish them, and the scramble that one goes through when one has to produce them for any occasion [say at times of interviews and promotions] is well known.

Seen in this background the Book "Views and Reviews" by Professor Harkishan Singh, is a true "Lessons in Writing, Documenting and Archiving".

The book contains reproduction of 101 write ups of Professor Harkishan Singh, written over the last 50 years, from as early as 1954 till 2007. These are not his research publications, but deal with diverse subjects and are related to the profession of pharmacy, biographies and musings on personalities, teachers and his contemporaries, key note address delivered in various meetings, symposia/conferences, about Pharmacopoeia commission, NIPER, about pharmacy education, pharmacy associations and their history [including breakups and starting of new associations]. His recommendations about pharmacy education, restructuring of same, pharmacy in colonial Indian and independent India, research in India make an interesting read. A number of his write ups on what we now call "Community Pharmacy"-referred to as chemists, retail pharmacy, rural pharmacy, Chemist and druggist organizations, universality of pharmacy practice, give a glimpse of his

value addition in areas that he himself did not practice. Some thing he wrote on International Nonproprietary Names [INN] in 1996 holds relevant even today. What HKS wrote about "Pharmaceutical education at Sagar", or "A Place for Pilgrimage for pharmacists- The Dept of Pharmaceutics at BHU", is some-thing that is a model for any one to see on "How to write on such topics about great institutions".

Huentsang wrote History of India long ago, and HKS has compiled in this book the "*recent history of pharmacy*" seen through the eyes of a teacher, who is a "Chronicler par excellence", and it is that history in which many of today's generation have played some part, and is not too distant period. Pharmacy students of today who want to know - "Who coined the name Indian Pharmaceutical Association", OR "Is Holding a position in a University a privilege?" and other questions, can find answers in this book.

Professor Harkishan Singh deserves compliments for compiling this book and APTI deserves great appreciation for publishing the same. The book comes with detailed CV of the author/complier and a well made index. It has reader friendly fonts in printing, and as it happens, the copy which came for my review has many pages blank, a thing that calls for better QA. Whatever were the reasons for APTI to bring out this book, it will not suffice if it just rests with this act, but make every college, teachers, students read it, go through it, and see the demonstration of importance of writing and archiving the same. The same applies to all pharmacists and associations to not only document their activities but also archive them properly. This book is highly recommended to all in the profession, and colleges who buy them should not keep them in their libraries to "decorate the cupboards" but 'start a new compulsory reading session', may be once a week in each class to read one chapter from this book, so as to inculcate the habit of reading and documenting.

More such champions, like APTI are needed today, and hope that this book would enthuse researchers and entrepreneurs to learn these lessons in documentation.

*Reviewed by:*

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